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This project is a self-reflexive philosophical thought experiment on Holocaust memory, imagery and pedagogy. I ask if the artist-researcher-teacher-I who is neither a survivor nor a daughter of a survivor, can present an image of the Holocaust that carries memories forward via inherited or vicarious memories gained through multiple means of gathering and storing memory information. I engage open-ended arts-based inquiry through writing and art, published Second Generation narratives, and post-Holocaust artists' theological, philosophical and artistic considerations of memory as I promote an art of memory and transformational pedagogy. I question which memory theories, theologies, and philosophies must inform an artist-researcher-teacher in order to intersect and interpret personal lived experience with that of eye-witnesses or other inheritors of Holocaust memories.

My inquiry is located within larger issues of Holocaust studies: memory, art, narrative and curriculum research. I theorize Post-Holocaust imagination through self-reflexive arts-based research situated in a fluid, contingent fictional blog of a Second Generation teacher/artist wrestling with her inherited memories. Concepts of A/r/tography, an embodied art, research and teaching practice, are engaged as tools to inquire into sites and disciplines of post-Holocaust art making that interconnect to beget layers of additional or new understandings or unfold those hidden due to cultural, political or religious constructs or metanarratives.

My inquiry does not end with a “final solution,” but asks additional questions related to keeping alive Holocaust memory through arts and pedagogical theories and praxes that acknowledge present reality (dystopic) rather than hope for future perfection (utopic).

DANCING WITH THE DEAD GENERATIONS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST:  
A FICTIONAL BLOGGED PHENOMENOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY OF  
EMBODIED POST-HOLOCAUST INHERITED MEMORIES  
VIA A/R/TOGRAPHY

by

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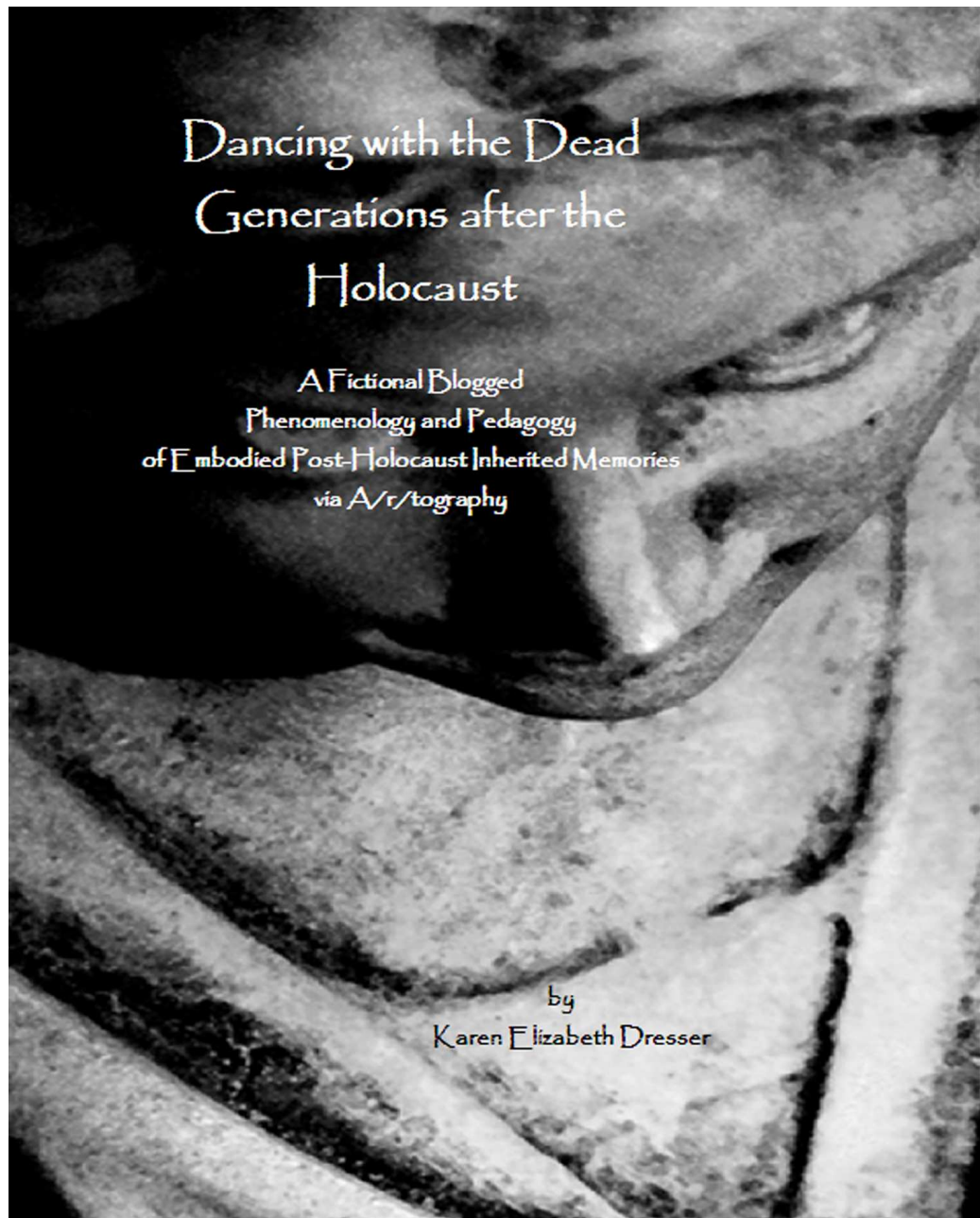


Figure 1. Artistic Title Page. *Folds and Containments*, 2008. Digital photograph

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**To my son**

Gabriel Seth Godwin

**In memory of**

my husband, William McArthur Godwin,

my mother, Elizabeth LaBombard Dresser,

my maternal grandmother, Esther Alitalo LaBombard,

my paternal grandmother, Marion George Dresser

**And in memory of**

and the millions who perished in Nazi concentration camps.

You are not forgotten.

## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro:

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## (PRE)FACE

### An Introduction from In Back Of and Beyond

Maxine Greene (1988) called for “a new way of looking at things” through a commitment to praxes of “educational consequence” in which the tools by which we educate students cut an opening, a space, a caesura, for the “remaking of a democratic community” (p. 126). It is in this space that educators commit anew to intelligence, communication and imagination. The roles Greene assigned imagination in the unfolding drama of education are: to open possibilities and alternatives to the cultural and educational status quo, and to serve as a creative tool by which to “defamiliarize things—to make them strange” (p. 119, 122). Greene’s idea of education was to create spaces in which those who are different-from may come together with many other different-froms for the sake of transforming, resisting, creating, turning, or imagining an even new “different.”

I am concerned with remembering the Event called the Holocaust, particularly as I interpret my own inherited, transferred memories from eye-witness narratives, books, photographs, and art. I desire something different in my own art making and writing about the Holocaust, something that troubles the normal studies, that engages me mindfully, emotionally, actively, and artfully in the difficult and sometimes ambiguous questions of Holocaust memory. I desire to grapple creatively with the issues of eyewitness memory, second-hand memory and inherited memory so as to make meaning of my own interaction with each facet of remembrance. I imagine myself as artist,

researcher, teacher, dialoguing with my art, research materials and students in a living, breathing way that affects not only the fluid situation of a high school Holocaust Imagery class, but also the way I live in the greater environs of the world. I wish for my learning regarding the Holocaust to move me to action in order to make a difference in the world. I desire to bear witness to the fact that I am alive and in opposition to those who oppress, maim, rape, torture, or murder others. What I desire for myself, I likewise desire for my students.

I agree with bell hooks (1994) who posited that if we teachers want to teach in ways that will transform consciousness, we should be prepared to experience the pain of acknowledging dominations—race, gender, class, and myriad others—in order to “bear witness, to hear . . . both the naming of [our] pain and the power that [emerges] when [we feel] that pain go away” (p. 74). hooks described the work that is created from a place of struggle and pain as “libratory” as it inspires teacher and student “to remember and recover ourselves . . . [to challenge] us to renew our commitment to an active, inclusive feminist struggle” (p. 74).

But in order to teach in this libratory way, I first have to struggle myself to explore how, in the experiential and open site of my art studio and classroom (where my theorizing becomes praxis), I set before my own and my students’ eyes images of the struggle and the pain—images that remember the pain of death of those who never came out of Nazi camps alive. I hope for a continuation of a distinctively Jewish and humane way of living after the Holocaust as we acknowledge the presence of other hatreds—even those related to the Israel-Palestine conflicts—and genocides carried on throughout the

world despite the warnings “never again” and commands to “remember.” No one is truly safe from extermination as long as dominant powers exist that wish a weaker group to be decimated.

My own approach to art and writing, specifically as it relates to the Shoah, is as a reflection of the world in which I live, teach and create; it takes into account Leila Villaverde’s (1998) notion of art as a mirror of reality:

Art can act as a mirror, confronting realities that are both in the here and now as well as the collection or summation of past events. Art can also heighten hindsight as it prolongs the regression into the past to gather enough information to deconstruct and discard those elements which are no longer needed in the purpose of the art, for the piece of art to work. In the process of making the art, some details that were crucial in the past event may be discarded or exaggerated in service of the aesthetic and commentary value of the piece, working through the disorder of feeling and thought into a terrain that orders it without the restraints of traditional structure. (p. 205)

My art making as Villaverde describes is always woven into the past as I interact artfully with a Jewish heritage that relies so heavily on memory and ritual reenactment of the past. Yet, I am mindful of the ways a mirror can distort my worldview through normative social, political and religious traditions and constructions. Therefore, I push within, without, along side of, between and beyond traditions; my art is in a fluid state of becoming. As I engage my own artistic theory, I posit an artful self-study of the Holocaust that focuses not only on historical facts and documents, which are constructed and often biased, but also on the interpretive, midrashic work of post-Holocaust visual artists, whose art is philosophical, theological, imaginative and interrogative. As a teacher, I encourage the ongoing artistic action of my students as they re-act to my

teaching through their own inquiries. Through these actions, I am able to breathe new interpretative awareness and practices into art making and thus interact with the open-ended debates surrounding Holocaust memory.

My main research question asks if the artist-I who am not a survivor nor a daughter of a survivor, can present an image of the Holocaust that carries the memories forward through inherited and vicarious memories. These memories are “passed down” from survivor narrations, novels and poetry, popular culture, iconic and original Holocaust imagery and other means of gathering and storing memory information. As an ancillary inquiry, I question if it is possible for the teacher-I to present Holocaust imagery as interpreted by visual artists and post-Holocaust theologians—hand in hand with historical awareness—in order to offer fluid, multiple and competing ways of studying the issues of Holocaust memory that intersect with my students’ and my ways of knowing, experiencing, feeling and art making. Toward that end, I inquire as to what current Holocaust and memory theories, theologies, and philosophies must inform me as teacher and working artist. How will the artist-teacher-researcher-I intersect and interpret my own lived experience with that of the imagery of the Holocaust, particularly as imagined by Second Generation artists or those who have accepted the burden or task of carrying forth vicarious memories?

I locate my inquiry within the larger issues of Holocaust memory, remembrance, visual art, and education. My interest is with postmodern, post-Holocaust artists, those who are not eyewitnesses but rather inheritors of the memories through bloodlines as second and third generation children and grandchildren, or who gain memories

vicariously through survivors' narratives, and popular culture. Further, I am informed by Jewish and other philosophical and theological inquiries into the nature of memory and meaning, representation, and post-Holocaust studies. All of these help me to dialogue with contemporary post-Holocaust art so as to understand how memory relates not only to first-person narratives, but also to the creative endeavors of artists, including myself, who have inherited memories or who have taken them on vicariously. The Holocaust memories on which I wish to philosophize within my dissertation are based primarily on Second Generation narratives and others' visual arts, but intersect other disciplines.

I dialogue with post-Holocaust art and theory that focuses on aspects of the Shoah decades after the Event and most often bears little resemblance to art made in the camp—art that was often representative of specific events and people, both perpetrators and victims. One major purpose of camp art was to record as accurately and realistically as possible what daily life was like in the camps as a way of proving and preserving its reality. Many artists now, decades later, including some survivor-artists, paint the Holocaust in different ways of art making that favor more intuitive, emotional, non-representational expression. In my dissertation, I engage in an open-ended arts-based inquiry through my own writing and art that draws upon published Second Generation narratives, and post-Holocaust artists' theological, philosophical and artistic considerations of memory. I engage Holocaust studies in ways that further promotes an art of memory that informs transformational pedagogy, and *tikkun olam*, a healing of the world.

My inquiry comprises a philosophical and artistic thought experiment through which I address my theories, questions and post-Holocaust imagination. I seek to influence my own lived experience through arts-based research in which I situate my fluid and contiguous *fictional* blog of a high school art teacher and artist. I engage the concepts of A/r/tography, an embodied art, research and teaching practice used by performance and visual artists to make inquiries into sites of art making that interconnect and dissect other disciplines in order to beget layers of additional or new understandings:

A/r/tographical work is rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/ teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/ teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others. (Rita Irwin, [On-line] n.p.)

Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis and Grauer (2006) documented that the introduction of “shifting terminology” for arts-based dissertations replace the traditional research “methods” with “practices . . . [which] involve a range of activities at the centre of research, such as customary approaches to art making, creative rituals, original performances, as well as a subjective position of intuitiveness and responsiveness” (p. 1129). Instead of relying on linear approaches to inquiry as does the methods approach, an arts-based “practices” approach “occupies a liminal space between long traditions of research . . . and even longer traditions of artful practice that have been

explored, composed, and inspired by artists . . . . arts-based educational researchers are never satisfied with any checklist, template or formula . . . [their] process is creative and emergent, a dynamic process of inquiry” (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis and Grauer (2006) p. 1229).

Tom Barone (2006) further advocated for connections to be made and sustained “between the artistic experience and the long-established traditions of qualitative research in human studies” (p. 5). He pointed out that Irwin’s a/r/tography work in British Columbia offers a freedom from restrictions on researchers who conduct their projects “within the current U.S. political climate” (p. 7). It is this freedom to engage in personal art as well as research that I wish to explore so as to stimulate my own and students’ art making and attitudes towards vicarious memories of the Holocaust.

A/r/tography, according to Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong and Bickel (2006), references each aspect of identity simultaneously and contiguously, and “the acts of inquiry and the three identities [artist/researcher/teacher] resist modernist categorizations and instead exist as post-structural conceptualizations of practice” (p. 70). The task of a/r/tography involves the reconceptualization of abstract theory to “an embodied, living inquiry, an interstitial relational space for creating, teaching and researching in a constant state of becoming” (p. 71). The posing of evolving inquiries is of utmost importance to the three-fold process of “moving in and out, and around the work, making connections in a personal way” (p. 72). For me as artist/writer/teacher/researcher, this evolution of unfolding inquiry spirals like the scrolls of the Torah scrolls on which even the erased marks of the past (particularly women’s pasts) still can be

traced and remembered in the white spaces between the words. Within the ancient past seek the recent past-and-still-present wounds of the Shoah, and interstices for becoming through embodied and fluid art making and research.

I engage, observe and interpret my own interrogations via a journaled blog of fictional artist-teacher Aliza Shalem as I question—through her—post-Holocaust memory, philosophical and theological implications of the post-Holocaust art, and my own theorizing and art making. I try to discover and encourage myriad voices and interpretations as I wrestle with commands of silence and speaking, remembrance and forgetfulness, blame and forgiveness, absence and presence, belief and unbelief. I engage a Lyotardian postmodern approach to learning that is suspicious of metanarratives that are manifested visually in art through culturally or religiously established and acceptable icons of Holocaust imagery, and as they simultaneously and paradoxically ritualize the narratives as acts of remembrance.

As I begin my fictional philosophic thought experiment, I am cognizant of the multiple ways that I as teacher/artist inform my own theorizing and artistic process of becoming daily in and through: 1) phenomenologically observing my own writing and art-making ritual; 2) dialoguing my art-making with pedagogical theory and post-Holocaust studies; 3) conversing with colleagues in the academic community concerning educational theories and ways of making meaning, and 4) examining of my own beliefs and perceptions—some seemingly set on firm ground, others in a state of fluidity.

As Aliza, the fictional teacher in my blog, engages with her students, she uses similar techniques in *fictive* sites to expand, engage and transform students' own artistic



interrogations on the themes of memory, inherited memories and the Holocaust. Through her students' inquiries, she sees them question themselves into being.

The novel as blog comprises my research into the philosophical dimensions of memory, post-Holocaust theology, narrative and art, and provides me a means of self-reflection and interaction with students as presented through fictional characters and events. It intersects with auto-narrative, poetry and art making as it serves epistemologically to trouble the waters of current curricula on the Holocaust in order to find new ways to uncover or acknowledge multiple and competing meanings in class inquiries. Glenn Hudak (1998), in "Addicting Epistemologies?" quoted Thich Nhat Hanh: "Learning to look deeply to see into the true nature of things, having direct contact with reality and not just describing reality in terms of notions and concepts, is the practice" (p. 254). The reality of remembering the Holocaust through an artful practice should not be reduced to mere signs (iconic symbols of The Event), but must be newly discovered and acted upon in artful experience. Hudak attested to the trickiness of language (1998, p. 259)—one word's interdependence upon another word—that must be grounded in how we experience each other's humanity. To be effective, my words and art have to take a leap into "living evidence" from the dead that somehow points to truths beyond it—truth that can't be tied to a logical system of logos, but that are woven into emotions and moments lived with others. I must listen to other words besides my own. The dissertation-as-novel allows me an emotional freedom to intertwine many other voices (of the dead, survivors, survivors' children, students, administrators, colleagues and

mentors) with my own as I query to create a meaningful, embodied, artful and theoried high school Holocaust curriculum with a goal towards *tikkun olam*—repairing the world.

In addition, my own situatedness in feminism and post-structural postmodernism, hand-in-hand with a/r/tography, gives me a view of a wide landscape of possibilities for art making, research and teaching that is not reliant on only one form of truth. I see and acknowledge many orchards and paths throughout sites of learning in which the trees of knowledge *and* life may be found. This is the embodiment of contingent and contiguous inquiry that I desire—seeking, finding, reaching, plucking, tasting, enjoying—through theory and praxis. This is the place where learning transcends the textbooks of facts.

While my novel takes on a skeletal “form”—the trimesters of a school year and the trimesters of a pregnancy—the writing flows phenomenologically through the actions and situatedness of the fictional Aliza. I seek an embodied inquiry that I seek, one that writes itself from the experience of the body, of which my interrogating and interpreting mind is a member. My research then will not be conducted as a quantitative search for a proven conclusion, but as a rhizomatic branching out of observed and interpreted colors for an ongoing pastiche of qualitative meanings. Art, poetry, narratives, blogs, and other forms of fluid inquiry will touch themselves to larger educational curricular inquiries like moss to the branching roots of a growing tree as the project evolves. The leaves of the tree will fall in their season, but soon others will form to carry out the cycle of re-generating, re-creating, re-memembering experience and knowledge that is always becoming.

The reader may ask what anyone could possibly gain from a philosophical thought experiment on Holocaust memory, art, narrative and teaching via the path of dissertation-as-novel. First, teachers of the Holocaust in any form may find the a/r/tographic experience of Holocaust study intriguing and helpful. The pushing of the boundaries of personal self-journeying through art in relation to narratives, post-Holocaust theology and philosophy, and the juxtaposition of Germany's treatment of 6 million Jews with genocides since then will give teachers additional learning experiences to present to their students. Second, the experimental approach through a/r/tographical fictional writing in dialogue with visual art may be of interest to writers and artists who wish to create an alternate dissertation experience for themselves, or for those who work within the interstices of past and present memories. Third, students of theology, philosophy and/or curriculum theory may relate to the ongoing weavings of the disciplines of fluid thought with the practices of art making. Fourth, those who teach art or who enjoy illustrated books may find the photography and other art of the dissertation provocative.

I write and make art philosophically and phenomenologically with all of these in mind.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: MEMORY, ART, NARRATIVE AND CURRICULUM

My dissertation begins with a ground of research. “Begins” may not be a correct term. Aliza, the writer of the fictional blog (Chapters Two through Four), engages in a theory of “beginnings” later, in Chapter Two. I will leave it to her to further explain her ideas. “Ground” likewise is not quite adequate language since I advocate going below ground to roots. Suffice it to say that within this chapter are the fertile seeds from which Aliza is able to nourish herself, her high school students, and her unborn child, and from which art making will sprout. She plays in dirt, allows it to get under her fingernails and dirty her clothes and body as she attends to the growing seeds—transplants, waters, prunes, fertilizes—until she finds meaning and makes art from the mature plants.

#### Seed One: Memories Swirl in a Philosophical Waltz

Why remember, why remember at all? Is not human nature opposed to keeping alive memories that hurt and disturb? The more cruel the wound, the greater the effort to cover it, to hide it beneath other wounds, other scars. Why then cling to unbearable memories that may forever rob us of our sleep? Why not forget, turn the page, and proclaim: let it remain buried beneath the dark nightmares of our subconscious. Why not spare our children the weight of our collective burden and allow them to start their lives free of nocturnal obsessions and complexes, free of Auschwitz and its shadows? (Elie Wiesel, 1979, p.1)

We “remember” continually, employing the phrase “I remember . . .” to spin stories of our past in a particular time or event, or to essentialize, expound or confirm

some important “truth.” Our memories count in the present; we assume that they make a difference to our present experience, our arguments and the meaning we place on our lives. But what does it mean to remember in a philosophical way? How do the memories themselves influence our being-in-the world, and what does the act of remembering add to the meaning of our existence?

In this section, I examine the meaning of memories in order to find artistically appropriate ways to remember the Holocaust, beginning with Elie Wiesel’s understanding of memory, then tracing briefly Plato and Nietzsche’s writings on memory. I visit postmodern and post-Holocaust philosophers and writers who shed light on how memory theories have changed over the past two decades. I then examine memory in relation to the Holocaust, attending to which memories are privileged above others. Above all and finally, I ask questions that I intend to serve as a springboard for imaginative musings on memory.

### A Chain of Memory Philosophies

Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel used the word “remember” in several ways. One was as a command to survivors to remember what they themselves have endured, even if the memories of their experiences cause them pain and nightmares. To remember in this sense is proof that one is alive, one has survived or, as Emile Fackenheim coined, one has not granted “Hitler a posthumous victory” (cited by Morgan, 2001, p. 157). Another way Wiesel employed the imperative “remember” as a positive charge to humanity to avoid the negative response of forgetting the 20<sup>th</sup> century political actions of Germany that led to the extermination of millions of Jews. It was Wiesel’s desire that we always carry the

Holocaust in our conscious memory, an idea of memory that is likewise tied to the Fackenheimian dictate not to grant a posthumous victory to the Nazi regime. We may infer from Wiesel's command to "remember" that if we dare forget, the event could possibly be repeated. Even more troublesome is the idea that forgetfulness renders those who perished fully obliterated and outside the scope of human affairs, as if they never existed. This concept is unacceptable to Jewish thought which holds memory, remembrance and commemoration as an imperative. It is a sacred commandment in Jewish writings to remember, *litzkor*.

It is helpful to examine the multiple meanings of the word "memory" before attempting to trace the history of its philosophical understandings. The first entry of the word memory in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2007) is as "senses relating to the action or process of commemorating, recollecting, or remembering." Those senses include taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing—external, experiential awareness of an event through the senses. The definition of sense can be widened to include the faculties of intellect and spirit. Included in the expanded definition of memory is "an act or instance of remembrance; a representation in the memory, a recollection," "the faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past," and "a person or thing held in remembrance." The etymology is traced back to the classical Latin, *memoria*, which contains the notion of "reduplicated formation."

A memory, then, is not only understood as event/experience, but also as the ability to call forth the past through the activities of the whole body, mind, senses and



spirit. This idea plays with a metaphysical notion of memory that involves conjecture or intuition, which science cannot ascertain. Sometimes called a “memory-belief,” memory in this definition traipses over to the realm of imagination. Human experiential sense memories which incorporate elements of imaginative memory do not render the experiential memory any less untrue. Rather, the imaginative elements often point to a particularly enjoyable or traumatic event in our lives that we have embellished in our memory processes. Recall, in psychological terms, involves a conscious act of bringing to mind something previously learned and experienced. Memory, in contrast, often enters consciousness unsummoned, through dreams or unexpected sense-prompts. It is, therefore, more ambiguous and fluid than recall.

Jeffrey Andrew Barash (1997) traces several philosophic debates on memory’s definition and purpose back to Plato’s theory of *reminiscence*, which extends the notions of sense perceptions (mere copies of originals) to what eternally *is*. Barash called attention to Plato’s priority to mental recollection over what can be perceived through senses; Plato also adhered to the thesis that when learning occurs, the learner is merely remembering the eternal through the vehicle of the eternal soul as an a priori source of eternal truth.

Aristotle, Locke and Hegel added valuable links to the memory chain, but it was Nietzsche who offered the theory that “memory has nothing to do with nerves, with brain. It is an original property. Since man carries within himself the memory of all past generations. The image of memory is something very ingenious and very rare” (cited by Barash, p. 716). Nietzsche suggested that historical remembrance (historiography) cannot

be tolerated unless it is first “transformed into art, and thus becoming a pure artistic creation . . . it maintain[s] or perhaps even arouse[s] instincts. Such historiography would, however, completely contradict the analytic and inartistic traits of our time, for which such transformation would represent a falsification” (cited by Barash, p. 716-17). This falsification, interestingly, is an idea still held by some who wish only Holocaust survivor testimony and art in the camps to be the only witness. Nietzsche considered the idea of humanity carrying the memory of all past generations as too cumbersome and impossible a task; he dismissed memory for imagination.

Vanessa Lemm (2006) further explained the Nietzschean theory of forgetfulness as a creative method of overcoming the memory of the will, a form of domination used in order to force the individual into societal order and submission. Here, the 1934 Leni Riefenstahl film *Triumph of the Will* comes to mind, with its artful rows of ordered humanity neat and compliant to Hitler’s commands. While Nietzsche interpreted the memory of the will as producing reason, a necessity for human survival in a socio-political way of life, he privileged forgetfulness as a way to return to a state prior and more desirable than “the morality of custom” (Lemm, 2006, n.p.). Nietzsche’s forgetfulness gives humans the ability to re-begin, to break free of the chains of the present. It is a “promise [that] welcomes the return of animal forgetfulness as that force which disrupts the identity between past, present and future in the name of the free and spontaneous generation of life” (Lemm, 2006, n.p.). Inherent in forgetfulness, from Nietzsche’s insistence on historiography transformed as art, is the importance of artistic imagination. This notion can be problematized by questioning whether a notion of

imaginative forgetfulness should allow us as inheritors of vicarious traumatic memories to break the chains of the memory. While possibly operating as a psychological technique for survivors attempting to remove themselves from some of the more poignant and painful memories of the Holocaust, forgetfulness does those of us who inherit their memories a disservice if we are asked to be ongoing witnesses to the Event. Perhaps there is a need to further understand “forgetfulness” as the imaginative memory site itself that allows us to re-begin to re-member ourselves despite the memories.

### Postmodern Memory

Postmodern theories of memory address the difficulties of historians as they choose what to include or discard in their writings of the events of postmodernity. Post-Holocaust theories seek to find meaning in memories that often are rooted in deep trauma. Of particular interest are eye-witness accounts of survivors, liberators and perpetrators in the ongoing desire to make meaning or at least memories out of the ghastliness of the concentration camps.

Pierre Nora (1989) wrote of a present that was quickly retreating into historical past in what he referred to as a “rupture of equilibrium” (p. 7). In the place of *milieu de memoire*, environments of memory, he identified *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, in which humans choose and discard events of their lives for the organized, official historical account. Nora posited an “integrated, dictatorial memory—unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth” (Nora, 1999, p. 8). In this view of lived memory, every

step and gesture would be carried out as a living act, unlike history, which is bound to time and progress:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer . . . a representation of the past . . . [that] calls for analysis and criticism. (Nora, 1999, 10)

Nora suggested that if we were still able to exist within an integrated historical memory, we would not have to “consecrate *lieux de memoire*” in its name” (p. 8). *Lieux de memoire* is not spontaneous, but rather deliberate “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death . . . ” (Nora, p. 12). The conclusion Nora made is that what is termed memory today is “already history. . . The quest for memory is the search for one’s history” (p. 13). This is the memory that searches in the archives of the trace, the recording, the photograph. What was lived traditional memory is now recorded and catalogued; its volumes, suggested Nora, are made sacred not as a social practice that lives among us, but as a ritualized act that expresses a “terrorism of historicized memory” (p. 14).

Nora’s critique of memory as spontaneous life bears resemblance to Nietzsche’s notion of humanity carrying within it the memory of all past generations. Nietzsche’s forgetfulness and Nora’s *lieux de memoire* both allow us, in some sense, to dwell in a shadow region of remembrance that re-generates history, allows it “a secondary, purely transferential existence, even a kind of awakening” (Nora, p. 24). History “has become

our replaceable imagination . . . . [and m]emory has been promoted to the center of history” (Nora, p. 24). Perhaps by abandoning historical memory for Nietzsche’s imagination and Nora’s *lieux de memoir* we are able to practice forgetfulness leading to living memory that is constantly in a state of becoming is what we postmodernists need.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (2004) brought to light functional differences in anamnesis (memory or recollection) and history. While both “keep present what is forgotten” (p. 107), the former is unpredictable, invisible and clouded with unknown variables, while history employs witnesses to remember the past with fidelity. History, then, is bound to fixed language and form. Not so anamnesis.

[Anamnesis] explores the meanings of a given ‘present’, of an expression of the here and how, without immediate concern for (referential) reality, and it does this by means of associations which are said to be ‘free’ . . . . to associate and be fearless of the incongruous, the abuser and the scandalous . . . . (Lyotard, 2004, p. 108)

Lyotard urged that we “can and must remember the *Shoah*, but the terrible thing is that it was not an object of history, but a matter for anamnesis” (p. 107-08) since the rationale for the chain of memories that take us back to Auschwitz

is never presentable in terms of a past event (originary scene). It is immemorial. Nevertheless, it is ever-‘present’ as that which determines association. Absent from memory, unrepresentable, it has ‘presence’. It is condemned not to be forgotten not in the way that an event that has occurred may not be remembered, but because there has not been a site or a time in which the event could have been inscribed. (Lyotard, 2004, p. 109)

Lyotard refers to the work of anamnesis as talmudic due to its ever-expanding boundaries of associative representations. It may be inferred that anamnesis privileges the

imagination over reason in its wanderings from association to association, although imaginative activity in Lyotard's anamnesis is termed "the Thing, encrypted in the unconscious" (p. 110), that is, the element that occupies the work of anamnesis, as opposed to or in paradoxical relationship with "the Voice":

The Voice speaks to you only in the sense that it is addressed to you, but its language is unknown to you. You fail to translate it into your idiom: your speech, your gesture, are ethical in as much as they struggle to answer to the obscure demand . . . . To remain outside pretence, to abstain, is this not the best ethos? Here you are forced into a corner, maybe a poetic soul able to form a reply to the Voice, or else disengaged from the will, abandoned, convinced of absurdity, what's the difference or what does it matter? . . . . There is no conclusion. Even after your death, it will be said of you equally: She ought to have been able to answer, or not answer, the Voice. (p. 111)

Lyotard's Thing, however, does not require an answer as it is never fully in the realm of human consciousness. He likened the work of anamnesis to Freud's grandson's crib activity of throwing out (*fort!*) and retrieving (*da!*) a bobbin: "It is an aspect of an object to persist in being what it is even in its absence" (p. 114). Lyotard further discussed anamnesis in terms of artistic activity, particularly the art of those for whom memories of the Holocaust were worked through unconsciously on the canvas.

The question of art's recollective purpose as philosophized by Lyotard may be considered in tandem with James E. Young's writing on transmission of past memories not only verbally from generation to generation, but as "necessarily regenerated in the images that transport it from one era to the next" (Young, 1988, p. 145). The result is a web of exchange between present and past in which each is refigured through the other. Young posited:

In this exchange between past and present, every generation simultaneously inherits and transmits memory—which now becomes in itself a series of analogues linking events to one another . . . . In the end, reimagining contemporary and past historical crises—each in terms of the other—may ultimately be the only way we remember them. (1988, p. 145)

Young recalled Nietzsche's rejection of absolute universal truth while valuing its claims in a relativistic manner for "particular forms of life" (1988, p. 191). Young suggested that this perhaps is apt criteria for critiquing Holocaust representations and interpretations "for they allow both a plurality of meaning and a basis for evaluating those meanings" (1988, p. 191), which are both gateways into imaginative work by writers, artists, musicians and others to wrap themselves in the experiences of witnesses so as to "remember experience long after all of its authentic witnesses are gone" (1988, p. 132). For Young, the task of the critic is to discover how the Holocaust gave meaning to those who kept alive the memory via imaginative work, because

[t]o remove the Holocaust from the realm of the imagination, however, to sanctify it and place it off-limits, is to risk excluding it altogether from public consciousness. And this seems to be too high a price to pay for saving it from those who would abuse its memory in inequitable metaphor. Better abused memory in this case, which might then be critically qualified, than no memory at all. (Young, 1988, p. 133)

The one who remembers from the memory pool of others is said by some critics to have abused the memory. These "abusers" take the narratives of others to create their own memories. However, many who have been influenced or emotionally touched by the memories of others do not consider it "using" or "abusing" the memories, but rather keeping them alive through additional means. This is where the artists, playwrights,

dancers and filmmakers begin to create to re-member, re-create, and give memories new voices after the initial voices have ceased.

Dominick LaCapra (1998) examined another classification of abused memory in which the trauma experienced by the eyewitness (rather than assumed by the one who comes after) can be termed abused memory that often render the witness beyond even imagination's healing work: "For both survivors and those born later, the imagination may seem to be superfluous, exhausted, or out of place with respect to limit-events . . ." (p. 181). LaCapra acknowledged the difficulties inherent in creating and renewing oneself in the wake of trauma, but considered artistic approaches to the Holocaust as indicative of "the necessity of performing critical work on memory in the hope of renewing imaginative possibilities and reopening the question of the future—a necessity that brings art into a particular close, provocative, and mutually questioning relation with history" (1998, p. 181-82).

What is it, then, within the human imagination that sometimes allows healing from traumatic events to occur through writing and visual arts when the experience can find no tongue with which to verbalize aloud?

### Remembering the Holocaust

After initial silence lasting almost two decades after liberation—self-imposed or due to the burying of traumatic memories which the world experienced through newsreels, black and white photographs of the aftermath, and their own imagination, the voices of the survivors tentatively began to recount their stories, most often to their children as a warning, but sometimes to the world, so that their experiences would be



remembered. We who were not there were implored over and over again to “remember.” The memory, it seems, is not that of survivors alone, but of all humanity. Elie Wiesel, in his 1979 introductory letter to the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, consistently used the collective “we” when urging remembrance. Was it only the memories of those who were in the camps to which he refers? Or did he ask us all to be ongoing witnesses to the gas chambers, the death pits, the crematories, the medical experiments?

[T]he Event must and will dominate future events. Its centrality in the creative endeavors of our contemporaries remains undisputed. Philosophers and social scientists, psychologists and moralists, theologians and artists: all have termed it a watershed in the annals of mankind. What was comprehensible before Treblinka is comprehensible no longer. After Treblinka, man's ability to cope with his condition was shattered; he was pushed to his limits and beyond. Whatever has happened since must therefore be judged in the light of Treblinka. Forgetfulness is no solution. (Wiesel, 1979, p. 1)

“We” who cannot have eye-witness memory must not be prone to forgetfulness.

But of what should memory of the Holocaust consist? We are cautioned about a memory that we who are not survivors can never have: “Auschwitz and Belsen is still surmounted by a wall of fire which no outsider can penetrate. All one can do is come close to the gate” (Wiesel, 1979, p. 30). Herein is the paradox of Holocaust memory. We who on the outside of the gate can never remember the inside, and yet we are called upon to “remember.” What are we to remember, we who weren’t there? The event itself? The camps? Those who perished? The aging survivors, many of whom are all too soon leaving us? Are we to concentrate our memory only on the open doors of the liberated camps and the stories that were told sometimes decades afterwards? Wiesel wrote about remembering the lost and remembering the “Event.” But what does he anticipate our

memory to be like? He offered no definitive model for the shape of our memories in his materials for the Commission.

The yearly institution of Yom HaShoah, a day of remembrance for the six million who were murdered by the Nazis, is one way Jews have sought to keep the memory alive. Instituted in Israel, Yom HaShoah was conceived as a non-religious remembrance. In the United States, however, the day has become a combination of secular and religious observance. Often, non-Jewish members of the community are invited to solemn programs in synagogues for the day. In addition, commemorative museums such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and The United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC have entered into the public eye, as well as Holocaust courses and programs in colleges and universities. All serve the purpose of “remembering.”

In 2003, the Conservative synagogue movement ritualized the Holocaust through the creation of its *Megillat HaShoah*—the Holocaust Scroll. Rabbi Reuven Hammer, president of the Rabbinical Assembly asserted: "Having one central text, shared by Jews wherever they live, will unite us and make possible the perpetuation of the story. It will help us to fill what has become the new imperative of Jewish life: *We must all view ourselves as if we had personally experienced the Shoah*" (cited by Gordon, 2003, n.p., my italics). His command was adapted from the command of the Passover Seder, the ritual of remembering the exodus from Egypt through which symbols of food and wine help Jews to reenact the exodus “as if we had personally come out of Egypt” ourselves. Again, the difficulty arises when individuals (i.e., the writers of the Megillat HaShoah)

attempt to place all of us in the site of the Shoah; their approach is an enactment through words that allows us all entry through Wiesel's impenetrable wall of fire into the camp.

Further, it may be questioned whether the Conservative movement considers the written scroll form of "inherited" remembering more legitimate than other forms such as art, film, fiction. Does the reading of the megillah in the synagogue on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) make it more acceptable and even more spiritual than remembrance through Holocaust-related art in a gallery? Indeed, there has been a cry from theologians and rabbis for "a formalized and *less secular* [my italics] set of rituals if the memory of the Event is to outlive the last generation of Holocaust survivors" (Gordon, 2003, n.p.). What did these theologians and rabbis consider as secular rituals if not poetry, music, art, and even survivor speeches in public spaces? In other words, spoken words and visual images that do not reference God or spirituality are those on which some wish to focus less attention.

One of the megillah's chapters comprises survivor stories; these are considered to be the "official witnesses." Another element includes theological questions related to the Holocaust, and the message that we must have faith in God despite a lack of answers for what God allows to happen. However, this theological ritual of questions, like the Passover Seder, can be likened to the very forms of memory—art, poetry, music, dance—that it attempts to replace. Questions, unless they come with prescribed answers that must be repeated word for word, are open-ended and multivalent; the one who answers the questions dances with possibilities, paints an image, discovers moving tones on a scale of multiple answers. The arts disciplines are based on imagination that wrestles with

spiritual questions of meaning and remembrance. The arts are inheritors of Nietzsche's idea of remembering through the imagination, of an expansion of eyewitness memories by those who were not there but take up the task of remembering through inherited and/or vicarious memories.

In addition, assigning Holocaust remembrance a place of ritual equal (but without the yoke of commanded blessing) to the Passover Seder or the reading of the scroll of Esther on Purim also risks the possibility of a closed-community of those who remember. Does this not amount to a hijacking of the commemoration from the public sphere, where Wiesel in his Commission material thought it should be, to a private, privileged space?

This in turn suggests further interrogation: Should there be two kinds of memorials—one for those of us whose membership in Judaism privileges us with our own rituals of memory, and another for those on the outside? The question is itself problematic in the binary of otherness it sets up.

### Difficulties of Remembering

Of critical importance for any study or interpretation of the Holocaust is the consideration of memory. Are we to trust that the memoirs of survivors, whether written or verbal, are unassailable? James Young (1988) described the difficulties inherent in the work of a memorist or diarist because “narratives . . . are constructed” (p. 24). That is to say, while the persons themselves “may feel no need to manufacture [a] link between their words and experiences,” the diarist's written words

seemed to be living traces of his life at that moment: his eyes, his engraving hand, and the ink on paper all appeared to be materially linked in the writing act

itself . . . . But for the reader with only words on the page, the authority for this link is absent . . . . what was evidence for the writer at the moment he wrote is now, after it leaves his hand, only a detached and free-floating sign, at the mercy of all who would read and misread it. (Young, 1988, p. 24)

The witness then feels as if he or she is being mocked, despite indications that even as diarists writing “within the whirlwind . . . . once they enter immediate experience into the tropes and structures of narrative—necessarily convert experience into an organized, often ritualized, memory of experience” (Young, 1988, p. 25). In particular, Jewish rituals of historical remembering, as evidenced by the Passover Seder,

are nothing if not a refiguring of present lives in light of a remembered past. . . . Jewish memory and tradition depend explicitly on the capacity of figurative language to remember the past. In the case of Holocaust metaphors, we find that figurative language is never entirely innocent and is almost always complicit in the actions we take in our world. How victims of the Holocaust grasped and responded to events as they unfolded around them depended on the available tropes and figures of their time. . . .the figures and archetypes used by writers to represent the Holocaust ultimately create as much knowledge of events as they would reflect; and. . .screen as much of the realities as they would illuminate.” (Young, 1988, p. 89)

One woman witness related that “when the sun came up [at Auschwitz], it was not like the sun. I swear to you it was not bright . . . It was black to me” (cited by Young, 1988, p. 160). Are we to dismiss her memory because she speaks poetically? This is her reality, constructed and interpreted in metaphoric language. I suggest this is another example of Nietzsche’s theory of forgetfulness that allows humans to re-begin to live with their past.

## Inherited Memory

James Young recalled the story of young Israeli soldiers, who, during the 1967 Six-Day-War—two decades removed from Auschwitz—found themselves exploring “the extremely complicated relationship between collective Holocaust memory, their reasons for fighting the way, and their understanding of the enemy” (1988, p. 135). Some found that their inherited Holocaust memories occupied their thoughts: “It’s true that people believed that we would be exterminated if we lost the war. They were afraid. We got this idea—or inherited it—from the concentration camps” (cited by Young, 1988, p. 136).

Very few critics challenge these Israeli soldiers’ right to “inherit” the memories of Auschwitz. But when American short story writers, filmmakers, or artists attempt to claim the inheritance as well, based on Wiesel’s imperative, “remember,” some in the Jewish community click tongues at their chutzpah. When the child or grandchild of a perpetrator likewise “remembers” the horrific acts implicated upon others by her father through her own creative art making so as to subdue her own inherited demons, there is outrage among some survivors: How dare she infringe on our memories!

To whom, then, is the inheritance given? Who is exempt from its reception? Is inheritance a matter of physical or spiritual birthright?

## Desanctification, or Who Owns the Memories?

Froma Zeitlin (2003) called our attention to another issue in Holocaust studies, that of the so-called sanctity of the event that holds accounts by historians and witnesses higher than those of artists, filmmakers or fiction writers. Zeitlin described the act as “policing [the] borders lest this devastating event in any way be exploited or

appropriated, domesticated or trivialized, falsified or aestheticized—in a word, desanctified” (p. 173).

Doral Apel (2005) suggested that “survivors often tend to see Holocaust representation in binary terms, as either sacralized or desacralized. . . [Elie Wiesel] suggests that attempts to ‘desanctify or demystify the Holocaust are subtle forms of antisemitism’” (Apel, 2005, p. 7). Apel defined desanctification as

self-consciousness that always places "the Holocaust" in relation to the circumstances of its representation in the present, recognizing the fragmented and conflicted nature of experience and subjectivity, and the difficulty of retrieving knowledge from the past, while using the events of the past to produce new knowledge and greater awareness in the present. And yet even historians now realize that their writings are constructed, filtered and interpreted. (Apel, 2005, [On-line] n.p.)

The questions inspired by Zietlin and Apel’s writings are numerous. How can we (who are inheritors of holocaustal memories by virtue of being witnesses to the memories of others through photographs, newsreels, memoirs, art from the camps) remember the Event in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without being accused of anti-Semitism, or at least the desecration of eye-witness accounts? How can we dare to lay hold of that reality which occurred beyond our reach of years, beyond the wall of fire? How can anything we attempt to remember ring true in words or artful images? How do we dare take what some rabbis, theologians and survivors now deem a sacred event and recreate it in the image of our own interpretation and understanding?

Further, what will memory of the Holocaust look like in twenty years? Fifty years? One hundred years? Will forgetfulness due to fear of desanctifying the memories

of victims lead to another silence? How may we remember in a way that allows us talmudic and midrashic creativity in a public site of inclusion that perhaps allows the juxtaposition of other 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century human tragedies?

As in the past, it will be in the creative hands of our artists, poets, writers, theologians, philosophers and others to break through the wall of fire, not by dousing the flames, but by imagining themselves as being burned as a sign into the memory left to us as an inheritance by others. This is what we should teach our children and our children's children, before the memory recedes into the silent halls of complete and utter forgetfulness.

#### Seed Two: Second Generation Holocaust Narratives

The interest in narrative memory of eyewitness experiences during the Holocaust has taken on a sense of urgency as the years separate the present from the event and as survivors, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers age and pass on. The breadth and scope of current studies engage the reader in such topics as Melissa Raphael's (2003) *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*, a theological, feminist understanding of the Holocaust, incorporating women's narratives of nurture and care in the camps, to Lawrence L. Langer's (1991) *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. I begin with Langer's *Ruins of Memory* as it provides a foundation for examining oral Holocaust testimonies.



## Lawrence L. Langer's Memory Ruins

Lawrence L. Langer (1991) wrote in the preface of his book, *Holocaust*

*Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*:

If I have discovered anything in my investigation [of the examination of oral eyewitness testimonies from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University], it is that oral Holocaust testimonies are doomed on one level to remain disrupted narrative, not only by the vicissitudes of technology but by the quintessence of the experiences they record . . . they exhaust themselves in the telling . . . the losses they record raise few expectations of renewal or hopes of reconciliation . . . they are also hostages to a humiliating and painful past that their happier future does little to curtail. (Langer, 1991, p. xi)

Langer acknowledged that he began to watch the recorded oral testimonies “already suspicious” (1991, p. xi) of certain memoirs and commentaries that elevated the ingenious human spirit in the camps. What he heard instead were former victims who were still victims to their memories, to their ability to understand what had happened to them and why. They struggled with language—referring to their experiences in the camps as “different” in order to gain some sort of understanding from listeners, for whom they doubted could even comprehend in the slightest way the tales they would hear. Langer pointed out that the oral testimonies, in contrast to written memoirs that are couched in literary text and thus able to distract the reader from the “dreadful familiarity” (1991, p. xii) of the Holocaust itself, caused him to be “naked before their nakedness, defenseless in the presence of their vulnerability” (1991, p. xiii).

Langer arranged his material in five chapters: 1) Deep Memory: The Buried Self; 2) Anguished Memory: The Divided Self; 3) Humiliated Memory: The Besieged Self; 4) Tainted Memory: The Impromptu Self, and 5) Unheroic Memory: The Diminished Self.

One of his goals was “to begin to undo a negation—the principle of discontinuity which argues that an impassable chasm permanently separates the seriously interested auditor and observer from the experiences of the former Holocaust victim” (1991, xiv).

Langer began with the assumption that the sympathetic powers of the imagination can build a bridge across the chasm that allows a listener to “understand” the teller. He dismissed arguments of those who question the accuracy of “revived memory” since, as he noted, “there is no need to revive what has never died”:

[N]othing is clearer in these narratives than that Holocaust memory is an insomniac faculty, whose mental eyes have never slept. In addition, since testimonies are human documents rather than merely historical ones, the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy. Factual errors do occur from time to time, as do simple lapses; but they seem trivial in comparison to the complex layers of memory. (Langer, 1991, p. xv)

In Chapter One, “Deep Memory,” Langer spent considerable time introducing the purpose of testimony as a form of remembering. Witnesses of the Holocaust live with the impossible struggle to make their memories of camp experiences merge with their current lives attempting to exist in memory of “then” while simultaneously living “now,” an attempt that Langer interpreted throughout the testimonies as an “unintended, unexpected, but invariable unavoidable” failed attempt (1991, p. 3).

Langer devoted almost eight full pages to a discussion of Charlotte Delbo’s *la memoire et les jours*, in which she examined, in insightful poetic language, the renewal of life after Auschwitz. Delbo, a survivor of Auschwitz, used the terms “deep memory” and “common memory” to distinguish between a memory which attempts to think back to

how the self actually was in Auschwitz, and a memory which “restores the self to its normal pre- and postcamp routines but also offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then,” wrote Langer (1991, p. 6). He further elucidated Delbo’s use of the term “sense memory” to refer to words of testimony that are sensed such as “I feel death seizing me, I feel myself die” (cited by Langer, 1991, p. 9). Delbo’s “external memory” referred to words that intellectualize and reflect upon the Holocaust experience, and her “*dedoublement*” was a doubling of the meaning of self and the meanings of words.

Langer drew heavily from Delbo’s terminology and conceptions of self in his attempt to understand the two remembering selves of those whose testimonies he interpreted. He noted that deep and common memories conceal and reveal, but also sometimes glide/collide into the other as he presented selected testimonies that illustrate Delbo’s designations. Common memory often mediates atrocity while deep memory digs deep to layers far below the surface, “leaving atrocity and order in a permanently disrupted suspension” (Langer, 1991, p. 9).

Langer also acknowledged that a deep memory of what one witnessed happening to someone else sometimes penetrates common memory as present day nightmares or fears so that both become intertwined, as if the “then” of another is the “now” of the one remembering. He warned that as listeners, we will have a difficult time in establishing meaningful dialogue with the testimonies because we cannot imagine their past—we have no common experience upon which to draw. What we have depended on in the past were written accounts, which Langer suggested transform “the real in a way that obscures

even as it seeks to enlighten” (1991, p. 19). The oral testimonies make us not only passive listeners, but “active” hearers who must “suspend our sense of the normal and . . . accept the complex immediacy of a voice reaching us simultaneously from the secure present and the devastating past” (Langer, 1991, p. 21). He warned that the memories listeners hear will “induce fear, confusion, shame, horror, skepticism, even disbelief” (Langer, 1991, p. 20), and that even the unpredictability of the chaos of the camps will threaten our role as an audience to the testimonies. Those who were not there, suggested Langer, can only hear that any distinctions of morality dissolved amidst the desire to stay alive.

Each of Langer’s four remaining chapters drew from historians or literary works to gain insight into the testimonies. In Chapter Two, “Anguished Memory,” Langer employed Maurice Blanchot’s “impossible real” to indicate that we are all, with the exception of the surviving victims, “witnesses to memory rather than rememberers” (1991, p. 39). Langer connected this to anguished memory, which binds the consciousness it should be freeing, by suggesting that “[i]n the presence of [the witnesses’] anguished memory, we are asked to share less what is recovered than the process of recall itself, the crossing and recrossing of that perilous threshold until the destinations between entrance and exit blur and fade” (1991, p. 40). He again turned to Delbo’s thoughts, one of which states “Today, I am no longer sure that what I have written is true, but I am sure that it happened” (cited by Langer, 1991, p. 42). Langer also included Josef Yerushalmi’s quote of a fellow historian who wrote that an “historian . . . is the physician of memory. It is his honor to heal wounds . . .” (cited by Langer,

1991, p. 50). Yerushalmi, however, countered that “Jewish memory cannot be ‘healed’ unless the group itself finds healing, unless its wholeness is restored or rejuvenated” (cited by Langer, 1991, p. 50-51). He held that the historian is a pathologist, not a physician, yet was not even satisfied with that designation because “the historian does not simply come in to replenish the gaps of memory; he constantly challenges even those memories that have survived intact” (cited by Langer, 1991, p. 51).

Chapter Three’s “Humiliated Memory” included testimonies of painful memories that even the passage of time cannot heal. Langer posited that humiliated memory “undermines one of the foremost impulses to historical inquiry, which is life-promoting insofar as it mirrors insights from the past that enable us to confront the future with a more informed sense of ourselves as human beings in time” (1991, p. 79). Rather, humiliated memory demolishes the human spirit; only when one is radically insincere or self-deceived can one hear any kind of affirming voice. Chapter Four, “Tainted Memory,” examines memories that result in narratives “stained by the disapproval of the witness’s own present moral sensibility, as well as by some of the incidents it relates” while at the same time serving as self-justification for one’s necessary, but not always admirable actions (Langer, 1991, p. 122). “Unheroic Memory,” comprising Chapter Five, recalls those oral testimonies that thwart Holocaust commentary centered in martyrdom and heroism. Langer’s unheroic memory vacillates between hope and anguish—one wants to be hopeful and affirmative to life, but one always lives with the destiny of, and can never forget, being in the camps.

Langer's remarkable, comprehensive book (named one of the ten best books of 1991 by the New York Times Book Review) journeyed through the layers of memory of those who recorded oral testimonies via historical, psychological, moral and linguistic routes. The attentive reader learns how to listen anew to the nuances of the recalled events, to refuse to order them into easy, superficial categories. The conclusion was precise and astute:

For the former victims, the Holocaust is a communal wound that cannot heal. This is the ailing subtext of their testimonies, wailing beneath the convalescent murmur of their surface lives. We have little trouble listening to that surface murmur. When the subtext of their story echoes for us too as a communal wound, then we will have begun to hear their legacy . . . and grasp the meaning for our time of a diminished self." (Langer, 1991, p. 205)

And yet Langer's view is incomplete without discussion of those survivors who resisted, acted heroically, and engaged in relational acts of kindness for others in the camps such as those written by women witnesses and recorders of women's narrations (see Linden, 1993; Ritvo and Plotkin, 1998; Brenner, 1997; Ofer and Weitzman, 1998; Karay, 2002; Weisel, 2002; Saidel, 2004, 2006).

#### Holocaust Memory: First and Second Generation Studies

Several studies on Second Generation Children are considered to be "pioneering" work on the subject. Lucy Y. Steinitz and David M. Szonyi's (1979) anthology *Living after the Holocaust: Reflections by Children of Survivors in America* focused not only on the negative psychological aspects of childhood in a survivor home, but also on collective identity, strength and understanding of deep meaning that survivors' children attach to

their lives. Helen Epstein's (1979) *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* addressed a secret that "lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was . . . slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost" (Epstein, 1979, pp. 9-10). When Epstein grew older, she knew that she had to finally open the "box" and seek out others like her who she considered to be part of "an invisible, silent family" of Second Generation children (p. 13). When she found them, she wrote their secrets along with her own in a book, which is considered by some, according to Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger (2001), to be the "bible" of the second generation. The Second Generation children of the 1970's are now parents with children of their own. By sharing their secrets, they opened the doors to not only other Second Generation children, but also to the Third and even Fourth Generations who follow after them, as witnesses to the treacherous silences and tales.

*Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*, edited by Alan L Berger and Naomi Berger (2001) hoped to show through the memories and interpretations of an older Second Generation the universal significance of trauma and tragedy of the Holocaust as the essays explored home life, school and work experiences, faith and belief, and interpersonal relationships with family and friends in light of other incidents of 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides and ethnic cleansing. In addition, selected texts were brought into conversation as the social construction of the childhoods of these writers and storytellers were revealed.

In order to understand the Second Generation, the psychologies of their parents—the First Generation—must be given some discussion. In 1961, psychiatrist Dr. William G. Niederland, having treated numerous Holocaust survivors, discovered that his patients had suffered horrors in the camps that were often suppressed, but eventually came to the surface years later. He coined the phrase “concentration camp survivor syndrome” or “survivor syndrome,” for short (cited by Steinitz, 1979, p. ii).

Manifestations of survivor syndrome include:

- chronic and severe depressions, coupled with apathy, emotional withdrawal and disturbances in memory and cognition
- feeling of guilt (about their own survival while others died), marked by anxiety, fear, agitation, hallucinations, and sleep disturbances
- syndromes of pain, muscle tension, headaches, psychological disease, and occasional personality changes (cited by Steinitz, 1979, p. ii)

A helpful chapter by Erica Wanderman (1979, pp. 115-125) presented a psychological overview of other important early studies. She described studies by Koenig (1964) and Klein (1971), which noted that patients revealed the loss of most members of their family during the Holocaust. Many sought a spouse right away, sometimes entering into “hasty, ill-planned marriages in order to alleviate the intense mourning and separation anxieties they were undergoing” (cited by Wanderman, p. 116). The most important tasks in making a new life were to marry as soon as possible and begin a family—sometimes their second one, if their first spouse and children had perished in the camps.

Wanderman discussed Trossman’s 1968 study on adolescent Second Generation children which found that when even one parent exhibits some elements of survivor



syndrome, child/ren in the family will be adversely affected in some way. Thus, the symptoms of the parent/s directly relate to the symptoms of the child/ren. Some commonalities found in parents and manifested in their children were:

- parental overprotectiveness leading to child phobia or rebellion
- parental suspicious of perceived hostile world leading to child conflict or fear
- parental expectations that the child will give a special meaning to their parents' empty lives: they reconstitute lost objects, goals and ideals, and vindicate the suffering the parents have endured
- the child is invested with meanings and expectations which far exceed his own
- the child is treated not as an individual but as a symbol of all the parents lack in their own lives and hope to attain through the child (cited by Wanderman, 1979, p. 116-117)

Barocas and Barocas (1973) further observed that survivor parents “carry on almost desperate, forced attempts to obtain their own identifications through their children. In using their children to gratify their own conscious or unconscious desires, these parents may undermine autonomous growth” (cited by Wanderman, 1979, p. 117). The parents' own inability to deal adequately with their aggressiveness often led to their children's own aggressive displays. Parental overprotectiveness was often observed accompanied by a desire to “alleviate their guilt (i.e. their surviving, while others died) by becoming over-identified with their children” (Barocas and Barocas cited by Wanderman, 1979, p. 117). The children then felt an overwhelming responsibility for their parents' wellbeing that they were in no way ready or able to handle.

Kestenberg's study (1972) pointed out the importance of acknowledging certain variables in survivor parents such as “age, type and duration of persecution, traumatization and pre-and post-Holocaust experiences” (cited by Wanderman, 1979, p.

118). Kestenberg defined “survivor child” not necessarily as a child, but as a person born after the Holocaust to one or two parents who suffered persecution in some way. She considered a “survivor parent” to include those in the camps, ghettos, or in hiding “who, as a result, share some psychological characteristics relevant to raising children” such as:

- extreme rejection and denigration by environment
- self-hatred/”worthless”
- expectation for children to “redeem” their denigrated identity through special deeds
- exposure to sadistic realities
- incomplete mourning for important losses such as people, objects, past self, and institutions (cited by Wanderman, 1979, p. 118)

Wanderman noted additional studies that focused on survivors and survivor children such as Sigal and Rakoff’s study (1971) which observed that survivor parents were often so preoccupied with their own horrific memories that they were unprepared and unable to adapt to the task of raising children. Yet, at the same time, parents tended to overvalue their children. Klein (1973) focused primarily on children raised on kibbutzim (collective farms) in Israel, and noticed the role of the mother during and immediately following pregnancy, positing that:

- mothers views birth of children as a reversal of their own encounter with death and destruction
- hope of restitution of lost objects, strivings, ideals are revived during pregnancy and birth
- fear of damage and stigma which accompany the reality of pregnancy impose themselves on infant life events that only have meaning to the mother (cited by Wanderman, 1979, p. 120)

Lipkowitz (1973) observed that, in order to survive psychologically, children felt or believed they must follow their parents' wishes, which was directly tied to their parents' overvaluation of them; the child was often "excessively nagged and excessively humored [in order to] be hammered into an identity useful to the parents" (cited by Wanderman, 1979, pp. 121-22). Horrific tales of the camps were often told in front of the child; the child began to perceive the parent as fragile, suffering, and in need of care. Consequently, any rebelling on the part of the child was difficult to do without guilt. In addition, the parental view of the hostile world outside the home was forced upon the children as well.

Wanderman (1979), in response to previous studies by others, created a composite of a Second Generation person that included some or all of the following during childhood:

- exhibits anxiety and disorganization in response to maternal preoccupation
- has difficulty with self-control
- gives in to irrational impulses
- exhibits some form of depression
- lacks appropriate involvement in world
- possesses an acute separation anxiety
- excessive dependency on parents
- fears of outside world—danger/hostility
- burdened to compensate for parents' losses and empty lives (p. 122)

When the child became an adolescent, the composite changed as the teenager sought to establish an identity of his or her own, often unsuccessfully, with the following possible observations:

- identification with parents' depressive outlook
- sense of damage
- vigilant fearfulness
- emptiness and alienation from surrounding culture and activities
- struggle not to accept this identification with parents, leading to guilt-ridden protectiveness of them
- if parents were viewed as victims, rebellion against them was denied or met passively
- if parents were viewed as super-human hero, teen's self-image may have included feelings of elitism or chosen descendancy (Wanderman, 1979, p. 122)

Of the noteworthy case studies published more recently, two are mentioned here. Ilany Kogan (1995), heard, as described by Janine Chasseguet Smirgel in the forward to the book, "a different, mute, scream from the children she meets . . . [as] she teaches us to find the shards of parents' histories, through their verbal material, but even more often in acts, in entire episodes of the lives of her patients" (p. xii). Terez Virag (2000) centered her methodology on the child but involved the whole family in the therapy sessions. She was the first therapist to identify "Holocaust syndrome" in the grandchildren of the socially traumatized survivors:

I am convinced that the fears and frustrations of children who come into therapy do not arise from the primal scene but rather from the terrors of the wars going on around them, the nuclear threat or from the parents', grandparent's—often hidden—terrible past. During my extensive experiences in therapy I have been able to take a good look at that unique referential system which bears trauma and hands it down through the generations. (Virag, 2000, p. 11)

Studies of Second Generation children who speak as they write their own lives revealed the social constructions—some frightening and dark—of the childhoods into which they were born. Their memories included childhood memories of parents and

siblings and memories of themselves as children, teens, and young adults, including interactions with parents as the time approached for them to go leave home for college.

### Implications for Making “Witness Art”

The Second Generation of Holocaust survivors, now adults with grown children and often grandchildren of their own, continue to live in the margins of their parents’ shadow of death. They know the pain, the suffering, the deprivation—almost as though they had been there themselves—and yet, they know nothing but what they have intuited or empathetically taken into their hearts from hearing their parents’ stories or by witnessing their parents’ traumatic outbursts. The paradox? Nothing (that is, what is not their own experiential trauma) is everything—everything they experienced in childhood, everything they built on as they established careers, everything they will pass on by some means to their own children and grandchildren.

Second Generation childhoods were constructed from the ashes of the dead—half-brothers and sisters they never knew about until much later in life, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins—and from the iron gates of Auschwitz. While no longer locked to keep Jews in, the camps still confined their parents to painful memories that affected how they raised the children who were to be their restitution from the years of suffering. Second Generation children lived with memories—their own and their parents—that co-mingled and embodied fears and joys, deprivation and fulfillment, loss and gain. Yet they could not hide behind them. They had to explore not only the horrors of the past, but their own capacity for inflicting pain upon another. Michal Gorvin (2001) suggested:

In every person, the murderer and the victim potentially exist, blended into each other, constantly demanding separation, every single day, with full awareness. I understood that I could no longer hide behind the collective, ready-made definitions of memory. That there would be no choice but to embark on the journey that is obstinate, lonely, and full of contradictions. (p. 147)

The implications of Second Generation narratives for my own and student art making as vicarious witnesses to the Holocaust are rich. Contained within these life stories are recurring themes of paradox, fears, questions and doubts as well as the retelling of the parents' story to the next generation and the generation after that. Narratives and post-Holocaust art intersect, creating a verbal and visual voice of witness. When I view survivor and Second Generation art next to the narratives, I identify recurring themes, slippages, and deletions in both art and narrative. How can the narratives assist in an informed interpretation of the art?

Further, I wrestle with the dilemma (and introduce it to my art classes) of whether or not one who reads or hears the memories told by Second Generation children of survivors are now responsible for the memories. Are we ourselves now carriers of "the word?" If so, can we also make art from vicarious and inherited memories? What might this vicarious memory art look like?

### Seed Three: Holocaust (ART) Re-Imag(e)ining the Past

Six decades after the last Nazi concentration camp was liberated, theorists, artists, and museums continue to wrestle with artistic memory of the Holocaust. There is little consensus on how representation should be approached; those who enter the debate often

do so passionately and with a certain sense of personal truth that sometimes tends to be imposed on other viewpoints.

I begin with Holocaust theories that have had a major impact on how the Event should be approached. I then cite single authors who ask such questions as: Who owns the Holocaust? Who is privy to inherited memories? What form should art with a Holocaust theme take on? Can the all-too-familiar iconic images be deconstructed, re-imag(e)ined, queered, questioned? Should realism of any kind be avoided? Next, I attend to collections of essays of specifically chosen writers whose own questions mirrored ones asked by the editors. Finally, I propose additional questions and considerations of memory and art as applied to the artist and the teacher in art classrooms.

### Introduction in Black and White

Removed by decades from the freeing of emaciated prisoners from Nazi camps, 21<sup>st</sup> century art museums, unlike their close relative the memorial museums, rarely include the stark black and white photographs that captured our imaginations as poignantly as they did the holocaustal event in the mid-1940s. Photographer Margaret Bourke-White was present at the liberation of Buchenwald in 1945, and used her camera as eyewitness to the Event:

I saw and photographed the piles of naked, lifeless bodies, the human skeletons in furnaces, the living skeletons who would die the next day . . . Using the camera was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me. (Cited by Poor, 2005, p. 4)

Those who saw the photographs could no longer doubt what had been happening behind the walls of Nazi camps. The black and white images became the voice of witness for men, women and children who perished without opportunity to speak themselves of the horrors of their last days. The photographs were factual; they told the “truth”.

For several decades after liberation, those who photographed and filmed the camps in those first hours, days, and weeks were considered the true historical chroniclers of the Event. There was not much discussion; the cameras said it all. The world was inundated with the images of corpses and starving survivors. As Dora Apel (2002) noted, “once the world was informed, a long period of amnesia followed, beginning in the 1950s, in which there was little public mention of the Holocaust for two decades” (p. 12). Then Holocaust narratives, novels, poetry, theology, philosophy and art exploded into public spaces to eager consumers ready to cast off their forgetfulness in order to “remember.” However, not every critic was pleased with the representations being produced.

### Memory and Moral Imperatives Debate

A hotly contested debate about Holocaust representation began to take shape as the Event became distanced in years. Most debaters agreed that Holocaust survivors had a responsibility to bear witness to the historical event that they had experienced first-hand, and that subsequent generations had a responsibility to remember. Ernst van Alphen (2001) posited that as long as Holocaust survivors are still living, the history of the camps, the furnaces and the gas chambers are both present and past and must be interpreted through culture:



Cultural responsibility that befalls all those living now is to establish contact with the “past” part of the present survivors, to integrate them and their past within our presents. But what does this cultural responsibility toward the historical events mean? For most critics and Holocaust scholars, it implies that bare realism must be the most effective and proper mode for representing the Holocaust in art or literature . . . testimonies, autobiographical accounts . . . documentaries. This preference is based not on aesthetic but on moral grounds, for these modes of representation are thought to best serve our moral responsibility toward this gruesome past, because they stay closest to its factual events. (van Alphen, 2001, p. 45)

Holocaust theorist and writer Terrence Des Pres, a proponent of the “bare realism” school of Holocaust presentation, presented a series of Ten Commandment-like “moral imperatives” in the 1970s in which he dictated what kind of Holocaust study was acceptable:

- The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
- Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason—artistic reasons included.
- The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn, or even sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead. (Cited by van Alphen, 1997, p. 94)

Des Pres’ list left no room for artistic imagination; artists, like historians, must be exacting in employing the historical evidence of the utterly serious and holy nature of the Holocaust. There can be no Platonic/Derridean “play” with the images of gas chambers, railroad tracks, barbed wires, and ovens that have become iconic through the years. Any queering of images in order to disrupt the Event is looked upon with distrust and disfavor. The images are seen and interpreted in the present as they were in the past, and must remain as such, without being juxtaposed to contemporary genocides, philosophies or

societal changes that might deconstruct their original meanings. The effect is standstill memory. While van Alphen recalled Aristotle's theory of memory which requires action, Des Pres' dictates allowed no movement at all. Artists, writers and filmmakers in his view are resigned to be like the historian who digs for the artifacts without creating original art.

Andrew Weinstein (2005) noted that in 1975, Lawrence L. Langer, one of the leading experts on the Holocaust, "would reject the possibility that 'mere factual truths' could ever serve as a basis of Holocaust representation in art" (Weinstein, 2005, p. 72). Fifteen years later, Langer (1991) published his interviews with survivors and recounted how he soon realized the gaps, discrepancies, silences, enigmatic and metaphoric language that were evident in the stories, but became more interested in the ability of traumatic memory to layer itself:

Since testimonies are human documents rather than merely historical ones, the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy. Factual errors do occur . . . as do simple lapses; but they seem trivial in comparison to the complex layers of memory that give birth to . . . versions of the self. (Langer, 1991, p. xv)

Ten years after Langer's interviews, Dora Apel addressed these same issues as she explored artists who approach the Holocaust via practices that are "nonnarrative, polyvalent, metaphorical, enigmatic and ambiguous" (Apel, 2002, p. 4).

### Elie Wiesel and the Paradox of Memory

Philosophers and theologians who in their own work transgressed the boundaries of "bare realism" in order to topple or at least critique Des Pres's commandments began

to ask how far artists should go in their affective representation of the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel (1971) acknowledged the paradoxical dilemma when he pondered: “How is one to speak of it? How is one not to speak of it?” (p. 10). Wiesel later penned, “Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized . . . [it] transcends history . . . [it is] the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted” (Wiesel, 1978, n.p.). In a New York Times essay, Wiesel enlarged his own discussion as he critiqued Joshua Sobel’s play, “Ghetto”:

You see, memory is more than isolated events, more even than the sum of those events. Facts pulled out of their contexts can turn out to be misleading. Take "Ghetto." The author of this controversial production, Joshua Sobel, of Israel, insists that the play is based on facts. So what? By isolating certain facts, by giving them more prominence than so many others, and by illuminating them from a particular angle, he makes his play lie. (Wiesel, 1989, n.p.)

Lambert Zuidervaart further explained that “Truth content is the way in which an artwork simultaneously challenges the way things are and suggests how things could be better, but leaves things practically unchanged” (2007, Section 4) or, as Adorno wrote in *Aesthetic Theory*, “Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless” (1997, p. 132). While Adorno’s aesthetics allow the artist to dwell in a questionable and questioning place between yes and no, it is not the purpose of art to effect change.

Colin Davis (1994), in *Elie Wiesel’s Secretive Texts*, examined Wiesel’s paradox of art and aesthetics in Holocaust studies. Art can never tell the story truthfully and yet which must be engaged to try to do so. Similar to Adorno’s paradoxical aesthetics that insisted that post-Holocaust art collapse into itself to avoid becoming merely art, Wiesel’s “aesthetics of secrecy,” suggested Davis, allowed him to doubt reachable truths,

double and destabilize identity, engage in multiple reinterpretations, manipulate names and words, use fragmentary thoughts and paradoxes to interrupt the flow of the narrative that must not engage in illuminating what must remain hidden. Wiesel, it seems, used the tenets of queer theory and a Platonic/Derridian sense of play and deconstruction in his own work, though he might not agree to these designations.

An interview by Debra Cash (2008) with Guila Clara Kessous, a French PhD student who came to Boston University to study with Wiesel, provided another look into his creative paradoxes. Kessous was given “Once Upon a Time: a black canopy, a black sky,” an unknown theatrical script written by Wiesel over forty years ago. She relayed in the interview that when she asked him why no one had translated and produced the piece, he replied that “Holocaust and theatre cannot fit together. Holocaust goes beyond theatre.” Here is one of Wiesel’s paradoxes. When his play “Zalman” was produced in Washington, Kessous related, he “said there is no better way to face a problem than putting in on stage” (cited by Cash, 2008, n.p.). She found it intriguing that Wiesel’s relationship to theatre was both attraction and “deep repulsion”:

Each time he was making me remember, “I do not consider myself a playwright;” “this is not my tradition;” “this is *avodah zarah* (idol worship),” so each time I was saying to him, “So why, why did you use theatre for those particular plays?” And he was telling me that “I didn’t have a choice.” From what I understand, . . . the message he had to deliver was made specifically in a way that theatre would be the [best] intermediary to deliver it. (Cited by Cash, 2008, n.p.)

#### Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*

Theodor Adorno’s most frequently quoted and misunderstood statement, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1983, p. 34), was later re-called by him and

reinterpreted not as a dictum to abolish poetry and other creative expressions, but as an insistence upon situating the act within the barbarism of the era. It was barbarism manifested in Auschwitz that led Adorno to critique the religious idea of redemption within history as understood by theologians who wished to provide something to hold on to after the Holocaust. Instead, wrote Josh Cohen (2003), Adorno's idea of "redemptive gesture must always be a turning away from the redemption" (p. 25) since any "impulse towards positive religion is . . . a mere epiphenomenon of the social despair endemic to capitalistic modernity" (p. 27). Rather, from a Jewish perspective, "faith is not an unreflected leap into the unconditioned, but a tenacious holding to the ethical demands of finite experience" (Cohen, p. 29). Art, insisted Adorno, was the way to cling to ethics, but "only by an almost ascetic abstinence from any religious claim, or any touching upon religious subject matter" (cited by Cohen, p. 28).

Adorno's posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* presented an intriguing intertwining of Kantian and Hegelian theory, each of which critiqued the other as Adorno interrogated modern art and philosophy after Auschwitz. Art's concept of itself, he wrote, is as "inescapable affirmative essence" that promises utopian reconciliation; but "[a]rt must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber" (cited by Cohen, p.53). Adorno called attention to the possibility that, just as the utopian German-Jewish enlightenment ended in the furnaces and gas chambers of the death camps, so too "utopia" might end in world-devastation. "Art is not the fulfillment, but maintenance of its promise" (Cohen, p. 53).

Adorno spoke of art's task of uncovering and concealing truth as  
"enigmaticalness":

'Through form, artworks gain their resemblance to language' . . . but the moment it seems to expose the impossible is also the moment at which the impossible withdraws from its grasp, 'slips away'. In the artwork, truth speaks by revoking its own expression. (Cited by and elucidated by Cohen, p. 58)

Any reconciliation to truth that art may achieve must be accomplished through a blotting out of "every memory-trace of reconciliation," (cited by Cohen, p. 63) or, as Cohen restated, "Art remembers reconciliation in forgetting it, in abandoning any claim to its achievement" (p. 63). Adorno's suggestion that modernity produced a "catastrophe of meaning" likewise demands that art must "continually attest to this catastrophe by withholding its meaning, by shattering the graven image which claims 'to have the infinite at its disposal'" (cited by Cohen, p. 63). Artistic truth after Auschwitz, then, must be created in the form of a question:

Any attempt at representational adequation between the art and the suffering violates the truth of the latter, which lies precisely in its strangeness of any possible knowledge. Art must absorb into itself the experience of its own collapse as a form of knowledge; hence its recurring description throughout Aesthetic Theory as 'uncertain', 'a question' or 'a failure.' (Cohen, 2003, p. 64)

Cohen seemed to imply that Adorno, like Wiesel, used some of the same theoretical devices to privilege art as does feminist and queer theory—strangeness, absorption, collapse, and uncertainty—for "only in art can language articulate the promise of redemption without traducing it" (Cohen, 2003, p. 59).

Lambert Zuidervaart (2007) further explained that “Truth content is the way in which an artwork simultaneously challenges that way things are and suggests how things could be better, but leaves things practically unchanged” (Zuidervaart, 2007, Section 4, n.p.) or, as Adorno wrote in *Aesthetic Theory*, “Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless” (Adorno, 1997, p. 132). While Adorno’s aesthetics allowed the artist to dwell in a questionable and questioning place between yes and no, it did not consider the purpose of art to be transformational.

### Art Inheriting Memory

The artists of the second and third generations removed from the survivors, whether descendents or responders to the inheritance of the responsibility of carrying the word of what happened during Hitler’s strong arm of power, are witnesses of a different kind. Through their personal creative interrogations of making the familiar strange, the original photographs of the camps are re-imaged as post-Holocaust montages, such as Alan Schechner’s (1993) *It’s the Real Thing—Self Portrait at Buchenwald* (accessed at [www.dottycommies.com](http://www.dottycommies.com)), in which he superimposes a photograph of himself, wearing a prisoner-like striped shirt and holding a Diet Coke. Schechner wrote in an artist’s statement:

Central to my works is that all images exist in social and political contexts, and as such, all images are ideological . . . I examine how Holocaust images are used in a number of contexts, from Hollywood films to advertising, museum exhibitions to tourism. By manipulating and using these images I wish to raise awareness as to how they are often manipulated and always used with an ideological bias. In doing so, I hope to address our relationship to the Holocaust and its representations. (Schechner, n.p.)

Like Schechner, the artists of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and those working in the 21<sup>st</sup> re-imag(e)ine through postmodern questions: Where are the gaps in memory of survivors? What have they told us or kept from us by choice or trauma? What other symbols, besides the overused ones of previous generations of artists, can we use to interrogate Holocaust themes? How can we juxtapose the Nazi years with other genocides of our time? What political, social and cultural forms influence Holocaust representation? How does deconstruction, feminist and queer theory, and A/r/tography influence artists and educators generations removed from Auschwitz? How can we toy/play with multiple interpretations as did the artists represented in the 2002 Jewish Museum show, *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*?

The creative musings of artists, art theorists and curators have produced myriad museum shows and books on late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century art that engage the Holocaust in myriad ways. Each one provided a different slant on the ability of art to remember the past, and to help us who were not imprisoned within the bleak spaces of barbed wires and barracks to imagine ourselves or others there. This re-imag(e)ining, however, is not without its questions and its critics even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century since it transgresses not only historical tenets of “reality” and “truth,” but also deconstructs the present as it wrestles with traumatic and inherited memories.

#### Lawrence L. Langer and the Poetry of Redefinition

Lawrence L. Langer’s (1998) essays on Holocaust theory and representation whose purpose was to engage in continued “anxious dialogue about how our civilization



may absorb into its reasonable hopes for the future the disabling outburst of unreason we name the Holocaust, as it continues to assault memory and imagination with immeasurable sorrow and undiminished force” (p. xix). Langer dedicated one essay to the art of Samuel Bak, who described his own work as depicting

a sense of a world that was shattered, of a world that was broken, of a world that exists again through an enormous effort to put everything together, when it is absolutely impossible to put it together because the broken things can never become whole again. But we still can make something that looks *as if* it was whole and live with it. (Cited by Langer, 1998, p. 81)

Langer noted the ambiguities and tensions within Bak’s paintings: “substance and ruin;” “chaos and form;” presence and absence; memory and amnesia. These are united in their purpose towards establishing a future from the “traces of . . . loss” (Langer, 1998, p. 82). Langer attended to Bak’s use of “a poetry of redefinition” (1998, p. 82), an ongoing, active dialogue that requires a viewer to re-view each painting, then revision her or his previous understandings of human experience and reality. Langer further suggested that a poetry of redefinition required an altered lexicon whose language is that of “tainted familiarity” (1998, p. 84). The icons of the past—the Ten Commandments, the Star of David—all must be questioned, dismembered, reinterpreted, bent to a new form, in order to re-member them as new revelation. Bak’s art toppled the familiar and the normative: Shabbat candles are seen against the background of two ominous chimneys; the Star of David has sunk or been carved into granite as an abyss; the Name of God stands atop a ruined synagogue whose key is bent into a question mark. Langer suggested that “art projects images that assume a life of their own and gain the special immortality that is

granted to secular expressions of genesis, the act of creation” (1998, p. 100). Holocaust art, in contrast, begs us to remember and create out of destruction. It is to re-perceive the very root of memory not as an elegiac paradise, but as a wasteland of tangled, dislocated and abysmal chaos that “challeng[es] us through a veil of visual silence to change [the images’] mute provocation into the language and rhythms of inner speech” (Langer, 1998, p. 120).

### Daniel R. Schwartz and the Ethics of Imagining

Daniel R. Schwartz (1999) began his book *Imagining the Holocaust* with a short rabbinic tale about a nightwatchman who called out in the darkness, not to awaken residents of the small shtetl, but to insure his own wakefulness and attendance to his task. Schwartz wrote that when we engage in Holocaust study,

[W]e do so to arouse ourselves, to awaken our conscience, to keep our obligations to those who were lost, those who survived, and those of future generations . . . . We are indeed playing the role of night watchman reminding ourselves—and those to whom we feel an intellectual responsibility—to keep alert and attend to the necessary task of keeping the lessons of the Holocaust alive. (p. 3)

While Schwartz, a literary critic, primarily addressed imaginative written fictions, his explorative questions were ones that are helpful to any creative engagement with Holocaust representation. Multiple theories were explored: a possible disrespect of “fictive constructs;” how “memory transforms reality and words transform memory;” the possibility of non-survivor writing; the objection of survivors to certain Hollywood films that are geared to a general audience; non-Jewish writers who write about the Event; the use of “fantasy, hyperbole, and illuminating distortion in Holocaust representation; the

objections of some to any fictive or artistic representation at all; and the possibility of an ethics for Holocaust representation” (Schwartz, 1999, p. 3).

Schwartz engaged formalism, humanism, and modernism as he related aesthetics, ethics and politics to the Holocaust theme. He further immersed himself in the writing: “I dream of myself within shtetls, camps, and confined circumstances, as a participant in the very world I am writing about. I awake in a cold sweat from dreams of being deported” (p. 6). As he read or listened to eyewitness accounts of survivor memories, Schwartz realized that

memory distorts even as it records, seeks narrative patterning in its sense-making, and depends often on a repetition compulsion that wears tracks in the mind for subsequent sense impressions to follow. Memory breaks a trail, and in its iteration that complex path of understanding and misunderstanding depends. Memory relies upon narrative to . . . make that path into a road. (p. 11)

If narrative accomplishes this for the writer, visual art does so for the artist.

### James E. Young and the Edge of Memory

*At Memory's Edge*, James E. Young's (2000) book about post-Holocaust art and architecture, was inspired after writing several essays and lecturing about a generation of postwar artists who knew the events of the Holocaust only through a “vicarious past” (2000, p. vii). Alice Yeager Kaplan asked “What happens to the memory of history when it ceases to be testimony?” (cited by Young, 2000, p. 1). Memory passed down belongs to those who have listened to the witnesses; they are inheritors of a past vicariously experienced.

Young indicated the rejection by post-Holocaust artists of the traditional role of art as redemptive and noted that the artists of whom he wrote understood the ethical, political, and philosophical issues in working with “facts of history [that can] never ‘stand’ on their own—but are always supported by the reasons for recalling such facts in the first place” (2000, p. 2). Their art is an expression of their “experiences” of the Holocaust—the photographs, poems, diaries, historical accounts, plays, films, novels and eyewitness accounts. Young wrote that theirs “is necessarily mediated experience, the afterlife of memory, represented in history’s after-images, the impressions retained in the mind’s eye of a vivid sensation long after the original, external cause has been removed” (2000, pp. 3-4).

Young further asserted that historians cannot say they know an era’s history without becoming familiar with responses to it in the art and writing of the following era. In the case of post-Holocaust artists, they would have it known that their art is anti-redemptive: “Not only is art not the answer, but after the Holocaust, there can be no more Final Solutions” (2000, p. 6). Young’s own rationale for including artists in his book was that they do not address the memory-work of their art as redemptive, that they “ethically represent . . . the experience of the memory-act itself” (2000, p. 9), and that they engage the horrors that left a void in the numbers of Jews in Europe: “For these artists, it is the memory-work itself, the difficult attempt to know, to imagine vicariously, and to make meaning out of the experiences they never knew directly that constitutes the object of memory” (Young, 2000, p. 9).

Young suggested that the memory-art of post-Holocaust artists may impact future historians to examine their own practices: how do events and the way they come to us—sometimes vicariously—figure into the telling of history. He questioned the “instrumentalization” of memory in academic studies of the Holocaust and made it his challenge to memory-art and historiography—where will it lead us, “to what kinds of knowledge, to what ends?” (Young, 2000, p. 11)

#### Berel Lang and the Limits of Art

In a book on Holocaust representation “within the limits of history and ethics,” Berel Lang (2000) examined the effect of cognitive and ethical presence upon the shaping of a work of art, or “what the moral and historical responsibility of art is,” particularly art representing the Holocaust (p. 3). He employed an “is-ought” approach as he questioned whether specific works adhered to or transgressed “the ‘genres’ that have been individuated within the general space of representation [and] have assumed characteristic roles and conventions, responding to certain subjects and not to others, seeking certain effects, but making no effort in other directions” (p. 4).

Lang wondered if the societal conventions that placed the Holocaust in a particular historical and moral form should likewise affect genres of Holocaust art: “What the event was, in other words, would also limit or even close out certain possibilities to the artist while opening the way to others” (p. 5). He noted that those who call the Event “indescribable” or “ineffable” used terms that are “hyperbole, metaphor—underscoring moral and historical enormity that is not at all immune, however, to description or analysis or to the artistic imagination” (p. 5). He questioned whether the content and

context that produce our awareness of a work of art make a difference to its subject. Does an artist produce a work on the Holocaust merely to attract? Or is the creative act for the sake of conveying truth or knowledge? Lang situated his questioning in the sites of what he termed “accessability” and in that of ontology and metaphysics in order to consider the

constant turning in Holocaust images to *difference*: to the use of silence as means and metaphor, to obliqueness in representation that approaches the abstraction of abstract painting without yet conceding its goals, to the uses of allegory and fable and surrealism, to the blurring of traditional genres not just for the sake of undoing them but in the interests of combining certain of their elements that otherwise had been held apart. (Lang, 2000, p. 10)

From this site, Lang juxtaposed the artistic difference of the images to their historical and moral discourse, and suggested the “irony of dialectical thinking, a condition of Holocaust representation is the possibility of Holocaust *mis*representation—as a condition of Holocaust images is the possibility of their defacement, and a condition of Holocaust history the possibility of its denial” (p. 11-12). He suggested that if all Holocaust representation aimed to provide understanding of the Event, then “the ‘best’ representation . . . would be to reproduce it accurately, to the last detail—that is, to recreate the Holocaust itself” (p. 13) while still questioning the claim that each historical fact has a truthful voice of its own. Lang further interrogated transgression and representation, examining first the Aristotelian law of contraction; that is, “the assertion that something cannot both be and not be itself in the same respect [while] at the same time cannot be denied without presupposing that assertion itself. The limit posed . . . cannot be transgressed” (p. 55). Lang’s additional discussion highlighted the slipperiness of both of the terms:

[T]he transgression of [representation's] limits is judged . . . as 1) impossible and unimaginable [literal or iconic], transgression can otherwise be seen as 2) imaginable but impossible [physical limitations]; 3) unimaginable but possible [Kant's "Sublime"]; or, 4) imaginable and possible [moral limits]. (p. 55)

Lang (2005) suggested that perhaps silence must serve as the limit and alternative when representing the Holocaust, but not a silence "intended to express the impossibility, the intrinsic inadequacy, of representation of the 'Final Solution' . . . [but] rather a silence that emerges as a limit precisely because of the possibility of representation and the risks that that possibility entails" (p. 71). His "test" asked representational artists to consider if silence, when juxtaposed with the "voice" created in their art, would have been "more accurate or truthful or morally responsive" (p. 71).

#### Dora Apel and the Effects of Memory

Dora Apel (2002) suggested that art "illuminates traumatic experience through the sideways glance, allowing the viewer to apprehend what can only be shown indirectly, allusively and in sometimes surprising ways" (p. 3). The effect on the viewer can be disorienting and unsettling through a primarily paradoxical, affective conversation with the piece. The art associated with the Holocaust is an example of visual representations of that "which refuses to be historicized as an event safely ensconced in the past, and continues to drive a compulsion toward forms of enactment by those who did not experience the original events, in response to the trauma experienced through intergenerational transmission" (Apel, 2002, p. 3).

Apel's study on the art of secondary witnessing examined appropriation of the testimonial form, various artistic searches for memory, and the reinvention of memory as she called attention to the "construction of the narrative, the unavoidable biases" (2002, p. 95) of those who serve as creative preservers of survivor testimonies as they decide who and what to include or ignore in their art. Apel's objective was to

look at the choices made by those who attempt to work through and beyond victimhood to other ways of interrogating, encompassing, and living with the Holocaust . . . [by means of representation as] another form of knowledge that serves, in unexpected ways, to interpolate the blind spots of comprehension and to perform as a site of resistance." (2002, p. 5)

Apel's study, hand-in-hand with Young's, is a cornerstone of my own claim as a secondary witness to Holocaust survivor testimonies and other eye-witness accounts that allows me to imaginatively partake of the act of witnessing for the sake of continuation of the memory and art making for myself and my students.

#### Collections of Critical Essays on Holocaust Art and Memory

Several editions of collected essays on art and memory have been compiled over the past decade. While writers and contents are too voluminous to recount in this paper, I mention the rationales of each edition as they point toward the editors' reasons for compiling the book.

Barbie Zelizer (2001) addressed the necessity of understanding the visual representation of the Holocaust through its shape and impact on how we begin to understand Nazi atrocities. She particularly focused on the vast pieces of visual witnessing that has been created and compiled since 1995, and questions "what it means



to visualize the Holocaust, why doing so makes sense, for whom and under which conditions it works most effectively” (p. 1).

Zelizer suggested that her book of essays

contemplates a multivalent jump forward: it leaps into terrain that utilizes the visual as the simultaneous high and low ground of Holocaust representation, a default setting for considering the Holocaust not only through high modes of visual representation but also through recent phenomena such as virtual reality or tattoos, its so-called low modes. Each domain boasts its own shadows and reflections, and each needs to be considered on its own terms. (p. 2)

As Americans questioned the Hollywood images, the erotic and comedic images, and even the inclusion of other contemporary atrocities alongside of the Holocaust, Zelizer instead pointed toward a different line of questioning. Instead of asking what representation we should expect, she asked what

these modes of representation do differently from each other . . . . In other words, by admitting the frailty of each visual code of representation, we may find ourselves better able to go beyond that frailty and locate the strengths of each code. (Zelizer, 2001, p. 3)

Zelizer viewed photographs as the ground of all subsequent artwork representing the Holocaust and called attention to the transformational work of artists as they “recycled, reclaimed, and refashioned . . . [their work to] fit the codes and conventions of the mode of visual representation . . . at hand” (p. 3) even as they refer back to the original photographs and films with which the world first viewed the holocaustal horrors.

*Image and Remembrance* (2003), a book of art criticism co-edited by Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, was begun as a “commemorative endeavor based on

the belief that a collection of critical writing can itself be a form of memorialization” (Hornstein and Jacobowitz, 2003, p. 1). In looking backward in time to the past from the site of the present, remembrance occurs as a verb—*zachor*—the activity or act of remembering. Hornstein and Florence intended for their book to foster engagement as active practice so that in its reading, remembrance could be initiated. They recognized the possibility that their volume might be placed in a category that has been referred to as an academic Holocaust industry by some, but remained

committed to sorting through the complexities of [current] debates while avoiding a shift of significance from the subject to the lexicon that scholars have introduced surrounding issues of representation . . . [particularly as the artists and work with which they engaged sought to] resist erasure and inscribe memory. (Hornstein and Jacobowitz, p. 2)

Art, for the editors, is the only cultural form that is able to journey fluidly between historical facts and the slipperiness of memories.

The difficulty arises because some theologians and philosophers demand that no representation be allowed, or that it be restricted to realism or adherence to the factual history and previous language. Hornstein and Jacobowitz stated rather that audiences know the difference between real and representative reality, and that “there are various degrees of transparency and flexibility within forms of realist representation; . . . works which accommodate allusiveness and critical distance [that] signal their status as constructions” (p. 3). Based on the assumption that artists reflect an ethical code for their art that is not redemptive, Hornstein and Jacobowitz chose essays that engaged in dialogue about the Holocaust through the represented art. Their main structuring of the

essays came through the essay-writers' own questions about: sites of memory, loss, and how to commemorate; second- and third-generation memory, aesthetics and "the challenges of image-making, beauty, and form, given the interdiction against visualizing and aestheticizing the unimaginable," and the politics of place and remembrance, particularly in retrieving memory from traumatic experiences (Hornstein and Jacobwitz, p. 5).

Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt and Laurence J. Silberstein (2003) edited *Impossible Images*, which directs the questions of cultural studies towards representations in Holocaust art. They included essays that explored: processes of memory; relationships between culture, memory and history; differences and similarities between visual art and historical or literary representations; the ways visual representation questions assumptions of aesthetics about the Holocaust; differences in locations and geographies of where the art is viewed and how it is perceived in that site; how forms, arrangements, and sites of representation allows the viewer to come to various interpretations; and how certain pieces question current and prevailing theories of a specifically Jewish identity and history (Hornstein, Levitt and Silberstein, 2003, p. 2). In addition, the essays chosen for the book explored issues of so-called moral transgression of unwritten codes of ethical representation, ownership, construction, and display of Holocaust images, boundaries and taboos of evocative imagery.

Stephen Feinstein (2005) addressed the themes of absence and presence in his book by the same name. He chose essays that went beyond questions such as: can art educate, heal and tell a story, to a more nuanced thesis of art as *reminder* of

the possibilities of other forms of knowledge, as the real way of knowing what humanity has the capacity to do and achieve . . . [through the] image of the curse, the negative, the depraved, the cynical, and also the memory of what was lost in genocide. Art cannot heal the world and prevent another genocide.” (Feinstein, 2005, p. xxxi)

Feinstein hoped, however that the “fragmented image” of Holocaust art could allow the viewer enough knowledge to promulgate further investigation of the “full story” (2005, p. xxxii).

### Continuing Questions

My continuing questions are ones that I must be able to ask myself in light of the working principal of Rabbi Irving Greenberg that “[n]o statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children” (cited by Morgan, 2001, p. 128). I must also be able to ask them in the presence of my high school art students who study Holocaust Imagery with me. How shall I represent the Holocaust when the last of the survivors is gone? How can I juxtapose current trends and theories in post-Holocaust theology and philosophy with artistic representations of the Event? How may I reinterpret, play with, queer, deconstruct others’ ideas in my own art? How will I answer the grown child of a survivor who tells me that I have no business making art from the sacred burial grounds because I have no direct connection to the experience of the camps?

How will I say I should remember?

#### Seed Four: Creating Witness Art Vicariously as Artist and Teacher

Human consciousness exists even in events, places, objects, and people we know only through vicarious means: reading, conversations with others, narratives, viewing photographs, films and other media. Here, the memories are allowed a dwelling space in a site that lies in-between or on the borders of memory. We are not primarily witnesses to the Holocaust; yet the most powerful events remembered through our contiguous relationship to them seep over the invisible lines of personal experience and settle in the seemingly real location of vicarious memory. This is not an unusual concept for Jewish sensibilities: every year for two nights on the holiday of Passover, we recite a passage in the *haggadah* about how the Exodus from Egypt must be remembered and re-enacted as if “we ourselves had gone out” with the Israelite slaves. We who are millennia from the actual event speak of it as our own experience. Vicarious memory.

Herein is the dilemma of post-Holocaust representation for both artists and teachers of art. How may we be “true” to the historical facts which contain their own difficulties concerning the accuracy of memory, and also to the re-presentations of the Event that continue to appear decades later through vicarious means? May we continue to remember the reign of Nazi terror through the art of Roee Rosen, Aaron Schechner, Mindy Wiesel, Joyce Lyon, Art Spiegelman, and other children and grandchildren of survivors or whose memory is inherited from family stories and silences and whose art interrogates the memory and the question of “truth”? May we likewise remember via the art of the children of perpetrators? Or the art of others for whom the connective memory is inherited vicariously through historical, narrative or popular culture accounts?

The world moves on, leaving the historical site of Auschwitz and the other camps in the past. But memory allows us to bring the Holocaust with us into the future even as eyewitnesses make the journey to their final destination. “Who will carry the word?” asks Charlotte Delbo (1983) in her theatrical play about her experience in Auschwitz. Writers, artists, playwrights, musicians, dancers—those for whom vicarious memory via imagination is part of their psyche—they are the ones who will carry the word whether spoken as dialogue on stage, interpretive accounts in a history book, or a dark purple shadow on canvas. Despite some well-intentioned and passionate essayists, theologians and philosophers who would rather have silence than anything but eyewitness accounts, those artists with the ability to live vicariously on “memory’s edge” (Young, 2000) will continue to help us all remember the Holocaust not as a catchword, but as if we ourselves had gone out from the camps.

It must be stressed that vicarious memory is not imagination alone. Rather, vicarious memory continues alongside and because of survivor and other eyewitness accounts that have been recorded, filmed, written. Without the primary event, there is no vicarious experience.

### The Focus of Holocaust Education

After the profound silence of almost two decades after the liberation of the camps (and after the initial outpouring of photographs and films), theologians, philosophers, artists and educators began to approach the Holocaust tentatively as they, often within their separate disciplines, sought to find ways to deal with the chaos that had been left in the wake of the Event. While the various theoretical rationales are informative and

important to an overall understanding of Holocaust education, it is not with them that I place my emphasis; rather, I specifically research the teaching of Holocaust visual art representation, beginning with essay compilations.

Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg's *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*

Totten and Stephen Feinberg (2001) edited a collection of essays on teaching and studying the Holocaust that John Roth attested were “foundational and indispensable” (in Totten and Feinberg, 2001, p. x) in their multiple approaches and essential questions of rationales, goals, practices, criteria of Holocaust studies. In addition, Roth praised the essays that advocated teaching Holocaust visual and performance arts alongside of original documents and eyewitness accounts.

In her essay “For Better or Worse: Using Film in a Study of the Holocaust,” Judith Doneson (2001) noted that Hollywood films and miniseries “have indeed situated the Holocaust into our collective memory thereby better securing its place for posterity” (p. 194) despite oppositions to the films’ content and methodologies. However, when an educator brings film into the classroom, the constrictions of classroom time, the filmmaker’s biases, and even the motives of the educator must be examined.

John Michalczyk and Steve Cohen (2001) likewise addressed film in “Expressing the Inexpressible through Film” as they discussed the “graphic power. . .as a cultural, sociopolitical witness to the values of the period which the films depict” (p. 203). Their essay listed several areas of study (life in Nazi Germany, resistance, bystanders, eugenics) and films appropriate to each. Their instructional strategies suggested that the

films be discussed using the visual and audio aspects of the film as the starting point, rather than employing film as a history text.

Shari Rosenstein Werb's (2001) "The Inclusion of Art in a Study of the Holocaust" addressed several areas of study using art, including propaganda art, political cartoons, victim art, and memory art, interpretations of the event by post-Holocaust artists (survivors and others). She noted that all of the previously mentioned categories of art must be placed in their historical sites as students interact with them. She ended her final paragraph, on the National Art Contest at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with the note that "each year's outstanding entries were created by students who had learned from a variety of media (including artifacts, films, photography, music, works of art), and who had benefited from critical analysis of the history with an informed and involved instructor" (p. 259). Missing from her essay, however, is any mention on the multiple lenses through which Holocaust art can be viewed and how it has the ability to trouble students' thinking about their own biases and privileged knowledge.

Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes' *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*

In a helpful and inclusive collection of essays, *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes (2004) attended to mediated representations of the second, third and subsequent generations after the Holocaust. They noted "radical generational shifts in transmission concerning what aspects of the story are told, what questions persist, what layers remain unexplored" in the ever-present memory of the Holocaust as each new generation grapples with new problems, difficulties and controversies regarding "ethical limits of memory and memorialization [through ever-



increasing] sophisticated conceptual tools with which to evaluate these controversies” (Hirsch and Kacandes, 2004, p. 2). These ideas are particularly important in the classroom as the tension between the distance from the reality of Auschwitz and the present moment creates constant problems and struggles in any exploration of 21<sup>st</sup> century representation.

Hirsch and Kacandes proposed that Holocaust studies in the humanities can sharpen the focus of its current theories and pedagogies. Their aim was to introduce current Holocaust studies pedagogies and theories about representation. They did so in their introduction by examining:

- a rationale for teaching the Holocaust
- terminology and the inefficiency of language
- who may represent the Holocaust
- issues of empathy, identification and responsibility through an examination of perpetrators, bystanders, victims and rescuers
- students’ balance of analysis and affect as related to trauma through journaling
- interdisciplinary, multilingual approaches to teaching the Holocaust (Hirsch and Kacandes, 2004, pp. 5-25).

Hirsch and Kacandes’s volume, though focusing on literary representation, offers a wealth of interdisciplinary strategies, interrogations, and alternate sites for explorations that can be examined beside, over, and against visual representations.

Myrna Goldenberg and Rochelle L. Millen’s *Testimony, Tensions and Tikkun*

Myrna Goldenberg and Rochelle L. Millen’s (2007) edited *Testimony, Tensions and Tikkun*, a collection of essays for teaching the Holocaust in arenas of higher

education. Written by Jews and non-Jews alike, each essay emphasized the impossibility of teaching the Holocaust, yet each essayist considered him or herself to be part of the testimony through recounting its records—those of survivors, bystanders and of perpetrators. When Goldenberg and Millen were asked by their students why they teach the subject, they replied, “To change the world . . . one person at a time” and then turned the question back to the students: “Why do you choose to take the course?” (p. 3).

Goldenberg and Millen collected essays for their book to indicate

an exploration of the experience of teaching the Holocaust. It focuses on the impact of the teacher, the agony of confronting the material, the struggle to balance intellectual and emotional responses to the course content and to students, the challenge to refrain from imposing personal values, and the teacher; difficulty in dealing with an abundance of complex, painful content. (p. 4)

Several of the essayists stressed the difficulties of language and moral beliefs when teaching about that which is often considered a non-teachable event. The title of Goldenberg and Millen’s collection contains the Hebrew word, *tikkun*, “repair” or “fix”—a word that infers a commitment to bettering the world. The editors suggested that “teaching and study can and do encourage moral progress” and that educators who are “passionately committed to helping their students accept responsibility for building a more just, peaceful world” take part themselves in *tikkun olam*, repair of the world (Goldenberg and Millen, 2007, p. 15). I mention two of the essays in their collection that address the arts and cross-disciplinary studies.

Stephen Feinstein (2007), in his essay “Uses of the Arts in the Classroom” suggested that in the future, painting, sculpture and memorials “may become increasingly

significant for creating an understanding of the Shoah as well as for conveying the story to a future era, when the story will have become routinized” (p. 26). Writers and visual artists have embarked on a quest “for a new language, one with new symbols and new metaphors” (Feinstein, 2007, p. 27) that give the reader and viewer entrance into what Primo Levi called “the other world” (cited by Feinstein, p. 27).

Feinstein (2007) noted that “representation is not re-creation” and “cannot tell the whole story” (p. 29), yet art remains an important element in the teaching of the Holocaust, particularly if seen not as a representation of history’s record, but as a question about memory—how will we remember the Shoah when all eye-witnesses and their children and maybe even grandchildren are no longer alive? Both active remembrance and the slippage of memory into forgetfulness will impact how Holocaust remembrance will be written or imaged in the imagination of the future. Feinstein also posited that the permanence of materials used in artistic representation of the Event will also influence Holocaust memory: “Styles of representation always change, and in this respect the visual arts may be the most unstable and also the most challenging forms of memory” (Feinstein, 2007, p. 33).

Feinstein called attention to the further challenges for viewers who had no eye-witness experience—through what foundational vision do they see the art? He noted possible connections between Christian Passion art that attempts to offer redemption through the horrors of crucifixion and the Jewish idea of *tikkun olam* as a way to repair the world after the Holocaust through transformation and what survivor artist Samuel Bak called “an attempt to repair the soul . . . . A continuing effort to mend is what made our

lives possible” (cited by Feinstein, 2007, p. 34). His hopeful, reparative purpose of Holocaust art is a notion which some art theorists flatly reject.

In “Cross-Disciplinary Notes: Four Questions for Teaching the Shoah,” David R. Blumenthal (2007) emphasized the necessity to teach as if “nothing human is alien to me” (p. 161) even as the question is asked as to how this accomplished. His advice:

The first step is to admit our own humanity. We must begin by confessing, to ourselves and our students, that the Shoah upsets us, that the material assaults, indeed abuses, our sense of humanity and, if one is Jewish, our sense of Jewishness . . . . Only through honest self-examination can we come to the realization that the facts of the Shoah precluded—and perhaps should preclude—an “objective,” “ethically neutral” examination. We are who we are, and we must admit that.” (Blumenthal, 2007, p. 161)

Blumenthal’s article recounted his explorations and questions in teaching his college students about disciplines that intersect Holocaust studies: history (how accurate is historical evidence, testimonies and by what standards are they held to be truthful?); theodicy (where was God, what kind of relationship can we have with such a God, and where is the voice of spiritual protest?); sociology (what can be considered “normal” or “complicit” behavior for societies which allowed and promoted the Shoah, or looked the other way as it happened, and where is the fairness and integrity in societal authority and rules?); and social action (reaction via action after studying the Shoah).

#### Samuel Totten’s *Issues and Approaches*

Samuel Totten’s (2002) *Holocaust Education: Issues and Approaches* focused on a Holocaust studies praxis including lessons and units, critical historical and pedagogical issues including familiarity with key historicans, essential topics,

inaccuracies and misconceptions, and “the need to ‘complicate’ . . . students’ thinking about complex issues regarding the Holocaust” (p. vii). Totten’s complication of thinking suggested: attending to the contextualization of history that made Nazi Germany and its killing centers possible; avoiding the simplification of complex situations and stereotypical descriptions of individuals, motives and actions; examining in detail the purpose and intent of language (2002, p. 91-113).

Totten warned against simulations that distort, minimalize, simplify and perhaps even deny the Holocaust. He suggested instead that teachers invite survivors to visit the classroom or at least introduce students to narrative survivor accounts. Totten’s book, however, did not attend to issues and approaches to visual representations in the classroom, and thus is limited in its curricular praxis for my purposes.

#### Marla Morris’ Curriculum as Memory Text

Marla Morris’ (2001) *Curriculum and the Holocaust: Competing Sites of Memory and Representation* presented theory and praxis that crosses the boundary of mere intellectualism to the darker, slippery site of feeling, the place where most artists tend to dwell. Morris wrote that

memory of Auschwitz, that silent absent presence about which Madeleine Grumet speaks, has become lodged in my psyche. It is the profound silence, both educative and familial, that has marked me. The silence has called me toward the other, toward the memory of the other, and toward the other of memory.” (p. 3)

Through expansion of Pinar’s social psychoanalysis, Morris addressed memory through “a social psychoanalytic hermeneutic” that helped her recover her own inherited

Holocaust memory, and perhaps may allow other artists to vicariously remember through their own interpretative work.

Morris drew upon the writings of Jean Laplanche (1973, 1985, 1999) to develop a Holocaust curriculum theory that sought the “enigmatic message” or “third reality” that exists at the crossing between self and other, allowing us an understanding that was unconsciously placed within a text (or a piece of art). We perceive it as a trace, and some transference of the other takes place. Morris called attention to Fletcher’s (1999) “failed translation” due to rigidity, Laplanche’s (1999) suggestion that rigid translations are the result of our need to repeat old patterns of perception, and Grumet’s (1988) warning against becoming “trapped in transference” (cited by Morris, p. 8). Morris responded that we are trapped whether we like it or not; we cannot extricate ourselves. Our task, then, is to become

aware of our own habits of interpretation and translation . . . to lift repressions and resistance somewhat and become aware of our intellectual and emotional responses and trappings, and by doing so I think we can become more open to the alterity of Holocaust texts. (Morris, 2001, p. 8)

The writing of historical texts “are determined, to a certain extent”, suggested Morris, by “repression, resistance, denial, projection, introjection and transference [that] shape memory” (p. 8). Historians “select, imagine, deconstruct and reconstruct documents” (Morris, p. 8) according to the psychological interferences. In a similar manner, historical novelists and writers of personal memoirs are influenced by the psyche’s interferences, albeit in different literary forms. Morris argued against an absolute truth in historical writings in favor of Wyschogard’s (1998) “promise of

truthfulness” (cited by Morris, p. 9). To further aid in the task of truthfulness, Morris proposed a *dystopic curriculum*, which “allows interferences, otherness, alterity, and strangeness to emerge out of the different sites of representations . . . memories emerge not as a promise of hope, but as a testament to despair and truthfulness . . . I argue against hope” (Morris, p. 9). Morris refused to find hope and meaning in Auschwitz: “There is nothing about Auschwitz which is redemptive, salvific, or hopeful” (p. 10). Morris, following Lawrence Langer, Geoffrey Hartman, Ofer and Weitzman, and Deborah Britzman, also argued against any representation of the Holocaust that offered a redemptive, hopeful vision (p. 10).

Morris examined Paula Salvio’s attention to the other through “empathetic identification”—the “capacity for attending to how another person feels rather than merely imagining ourselves in his/her position, [which] is a powerful index to the social attitudes of a given period” (Morris, pp. 11-12). She suggested that “empathy can be a move toward making the strange familiar by saying, ‘I understand what it is you are suffering’” (p. 12), but questioned Salvio by cautioning, as did Wiesel, that we who are outside the gates and the barbed wires of the camps can never understand how those where were inside felt. Instead, a “cautious empathy, a limited empathy . . . a limited sense of empathy must keep the alterity of Auschwitz intact” (Morris, p. 12).

While Morris worked primarily with textual representation, her extensive research of curriculum theory and representation can be applied to a curriculum of visual representation, particularly as she addresses anti-semitism, memory and history, and her own development of a dystopic curriculum which “is skeptical of happy places and happy

worlds . . . . [that] conceal othering. Those who do not fit into happy places are exiled or annihilated” (Morris, p. 197). She posited that curriculum theorizing take place between hope and despair to become distanced from both extremes as it seeks to avoid “unexamined utopianism” that feeds what she termed “the evil of innocence” and the mire of despair that leaves one deaf. Morris posited that

there is no haven/heaven on earth, and school is not a haven, for it is part of the larger culture, the larger world . . . . when teachers attempt to protect students from the world outside they are unwittingly creating more difficulties for them. . . . Protecting students is a way of controlling them. (p. 199)

Morris’ dystopia acts suspiciously as it unveils the evils hidden under a utopian rhetoric. It attempts to remember those who have fallen or been pushed into George Orwell’s (1949/1977) “memory holes” (cited by Morris, p. 199) only to be forgotten. Perhaps imaginative thinking, suggested Morris, is the key to retrieval of what is lost as it

turns on the importance of imagination and the ways in which imagination enriches memory rather than depletes it. Orthodox canonical ways of thinking squash out imagination . . . . [and] other ways of thinking about the world, ways that might admit ambiguity or paradox. These other ways of thinking might allow for more heterodox, idiosyncratic knowledges to appear on the scene. (Morris, p. 200)

Morris called for continuing and broadening interdisciplinary work in Holocaust studies around gender, sexuality, class and race, as well as queer memories and transgenerational trauma. She suggested that young people study the Holocaust through visual and performance arts as educators strive “to keep this memory alive . . . . The



Holocaust lives in a present absence. It is simultaneously here and not here . . . too soon the next generation will forget” (p. 219).

It is Morris’s positioning of silence over and against witness without negating the other—a yin-yang balance of the two—that is intriguing in her book, as well as her call for interdisciplinary, inclusionary and arts-related inquiries, from all of which my fictional blog will grow.

### Interstice: Artfully Sowing and Growing the Four Mothers

My interest in Holocaust art is primarily with post-Holocaust artists who represent the event as secondary or vicarious witnesses. My use of this concentration in the praxis of making art seeks to elicit my own and others’ interrogation of memory and witness as we:

- Learn and debate philosophical and theological theories of Holocaust representation
- View and interpret selected examples of post-Holocaust art
- Question artistic, philosophic, and ethical choices made by artists in their renderings of post-Holocaust witness art
- Debate whether by our own informed ethical standards we can discover ways to develop a personal or communal art of post-Holocaust witness.
- Interweave post-Holocaust art with art that is informed by other tragedies, genocides, traumas, even dialoguing about the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflicts.

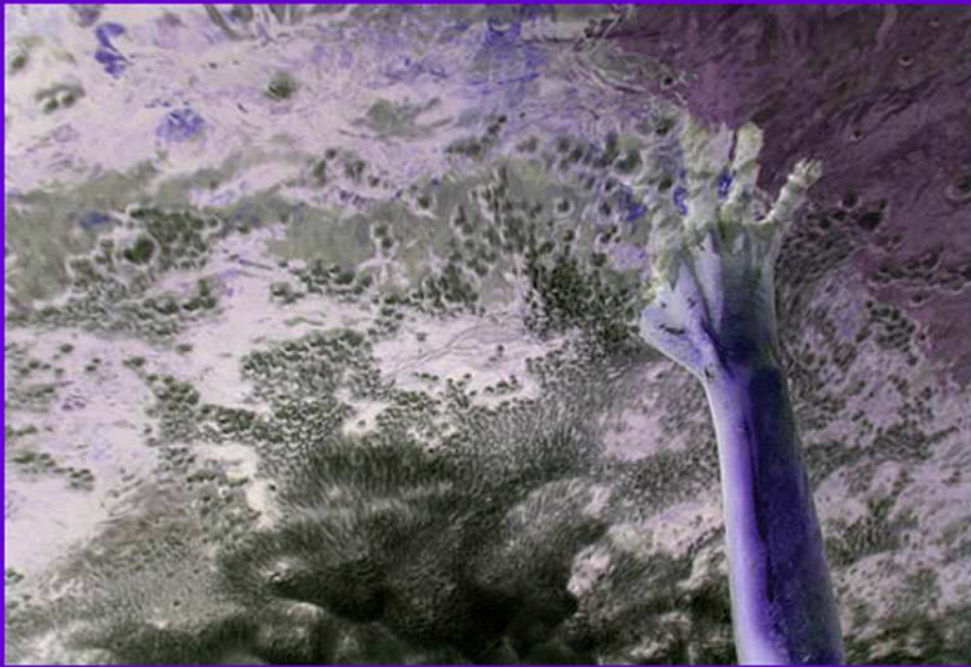
My methodology and form through which I will approach on-going inquiry for this dissertation is through a fictional blog informed by the methods of A/r/tography in which all characters are created in my imagination as part of a philosophical thought experiment whose purpose is not definitive, final or “Truth,” but which offers open and

expanding possibilities for the future of Holocaust studies through the arts. I base my fiction in my own lived experience; hence, I write and create art from the body. In doing so, I create imaginatively in a phenomenological manner and examine my own creative process of writing and art making in the process, through the character of Aliza Shalem. It is an ongoing, spiraling experiment of becoming, of pushing Aliza and myself beyond any boundaries that could impede imagination, while simultaneously questioning and unpacking theories of Holocaust representation.

The photography, art, and poetry included in the blog is my work, but attributed to Aliza Shalem, the teacher-artist-writer of the blog in the fiction. I base this choice on Pauline Sameshima's (2007) published PhD dissertation, *Seeing Red: A Pedagogy of Parallax*, in which her art and poetry appears as that of main character Julia Quan's. In this "re-assignment," my own creative inquiries are tied to Aliza's, as are my embodied experiences through which I understand and interpret my world as artist, researcher and teacher. I engage my body, inquiring mind, creativity, and artistic expression throughout each chapter of the dissertation, including the fictional middle three chapters.

However, Aliza's story is not my own. I am not the daughter of Holocaust survivors. **Aliza is concocted**, as are the **fictions** written in her blog; **they are created from a pastiche, layered and multidimensional, of what I imagine her life to be from my own experience and inherited, vicarious dream-memories of Holocaust studies.** Her blog arises from myriad possibilities in multiple sites. The novel that comprises the middle three sections of this dissertation could be any woman artist, teacher or researcher who is the daughter of Holocaust survivors.

# THE NOVEL



A Fictional Account of  
Vicarious and Inherited Memories through the  
Post-Holocaust/Pre-Birth Blog  
of Aliza Shalem

Three Trimesters of  
Growth and Transformation

Figure 2. Novel Cover; *Interrupting Heaven*, 2009. Digital photograph

CHAPTER II

FIRST TRIMESTER



Figure 3. *Red on Black*, 2008. Digital photograph

**First Blog: August 26**

This nine-month blog of thoughts, notes, poems and visual art is written as a personal challenge to create a year-long memoir in order to track my own trends and patterns of growth and change in curricular theory, philosophy and practice. I plan to intersect school life with my communal, social and home life as well. In addition, I will write honestly, and of course be open to multiple ways of

teaching, learning and art making. The desire is for my blog not only to reflect personal growth, but also collaborative transformation in my art classrooms.

Why have I chosen to write/photograph my memoirs and reflections as open-ended blog entries? I believe it will offer me a fluid way to develop a phenomenology of post-Holocaust writing and art. I will revisit past entries as events and growth experiences resurface in order to check them against my constructed and constantly changing theory. I will intersect my theory with all my art classes, but will particularly dwell in the site of my developing curriculum for my Post-Holocaust Imagery class. I write as artist, writer, teacher, feminist, post-modernist, activist, Jew, and as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-Gen'er—the daughter of parents who survived the Holocaust. My theory and praxis are rooted in my present environs, my past through connections to my family and community, and to the invisible ancestry and history that presses upon me like a specter in the night.

I also write as a mother-to-be (finally!!). It seems only natural in view of my long-awaited pregnancy to layer the growth and transformation of three trimesters of the school year with the three trimesters of pregnancy. They are one and the same this year, each with its peculiar complexities, pains, discoveries and joy. My pregnancy is intimately connected with the birth of my Holocaust-informed writing and art. My growing child is already experiencing the trace of my life, and that of my mother and grandmother before me.

My blog is dedicated to my husband Uri, the light of my life, to my unborn child, a third generation survivor of Hitler's attempt to annihilate Jews from the

face of the earth, and to my parents, Sara and Raphael Shalem. I am able to teach, write and create art because my parents survived, because I am both a survivor of their particular horrors and the result of their intimate and shared joys. My child's conception is yet another survival. Three generations. Three trimesters. "*Am Yisrael chai*: The people of Israel lives." My life and my work as a teacher and an artist/writer are rooted in the memories and in the space of life that my parents created for themselves in order to live and pass life on to me.

*Aliza Shalem*



Figure 4. *Rhizomatic Spread of the Tree of Life*, 2008. Digital photograph



## Re-(Sur)Facing the Trace: Teacher Work Days: August 28

It's late August and I am back in my second floor art rooms—thank God for air conditioning in this southern heat. My rooms are the only two on the floor with a splash of passionate red paint breaking the monotony of the industrial oatmeal beige (what were they thinking??) that dominates the rest of the campus. I have almost eliminated the conforming dullness, have resurfaced the tables with protective cloth, filled the empty spaces with art posters, student art, and a visual cacophony of photographs and art that illustrate the most common art terms: balance, perspective, pattern, proportion, etc. The same elements and principles that allow art to take shape form my own life.

There are also the women—eleven manikins whose presence are continually welcome, despite the fact that when they first arrived, naked, they made me jump every time I turned around or caught a glimpse of them in the periphery of vision. They seemed to me then to be a lineup of women in concentration camps. They are



Figure 5. *Four Women*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

no longer naked; my Costume Design students draped them last spring. They will be naked again in winter for the new class. Though they stand upright, I often view them angled and askance, waiting for something. . .

There are fourteen windows in my two rooms—I counted last spring when we had a practice lock-down. Campus security asks us to keep our shades drawn to better transition to lock-down mode in case of an emergency. I weigh my options even now: keep the shades closed and lose the beautiful view of the sprawling campus, or open them wide every morning and risk having to take five minutes to close them if a wild-eyed gunman—an over-the-edge disgruntled student, terrorist *or* the neo-Nazi / sometimes imagine—decides to wreak havoc. My mind is not made up, but my body craves the sunlight. As of this moment, the shades remain closed. After all, it is 85 degrees in the shade at 8am.

This boarding school in which I work is a wonder and a joy—I love teaching here. The students have not yet arrived; it is teacher work week and we teachers scramble to prepare our rooms, supplies, syllabi and minds. I prepare my body as well. Fully embodied is the only way I can teach art to high school students. Their minds, and mine, overload with facts and figures, dates and names in other disciplines; I offer them release via their bodies and souls (fully embodied, too!) as they create art. I focus on the power of art to reclaim their minds, eyes and hands from their laptops and the incessant longing (addiction?) they have to be on the internet. When reclamation occurs, the result is akin to a spiritual epiphany. Students suddenly realize that what they paint, draw, or create



with their bodies in the art room allows them to bear witness to something powerful that comprises not only the moment, but a trace of the past—their own, their parents, their great-great-great grandparents’—a trace of the holy, the primal, the spiritual. They feel the awesomeness of the moment, a moment when they can almost glimpse the face of the Divine (perhaps through the face of a peer or adult) in their art. When they try to tell me about it, they cannot. The spoken word, contrary to the opening argument in the *Phaedrus*, Plato’s treatise on love and rhetoric, cannot adequately describe that to which paint on the canvas bears witness. Word does not contain the world of witnessing.

#### **Then and Now: August 29**

I best paint and write what my life has been up until this moment. If I try to speak, my speech is fragmented and chaotic, like my parents’ nightmares that punctuated my own sleep almost every night when growing up—nightmares that awakened me from my own dreams, which sometimes took on an uncanny horror of their own. I, as they, dreamed pits of bodies, furnaces and smokestacks, line-ups and emaciated figures, Nazi kommandos and their damned snarling dogs. My parents cried out in German, or Yiddish. The harsh, guttural sounds frightened me when I woke up in the bedroom next to theirs and pulled the covers over my head to drown them out. Is it any wonder that spoken words evade me? Extemporaneous speech is seldom my friend. Rather, I crave the intimacy of the silent stroke of paint on canvas or the caress of carefully

chosen words in a poem. I try to convey this intimacy of art and writing to my students.

### **Between Sleep and Wakefulness: August 30**

I no longer hear my parents' nightly-dream screams (although no doubt they still scream them), but I dream them like an angel of death moving slowly, suspended in midnight air, over the doorway of the bedroom I share with my



*Figure 6. Disrupted, 2008.*  
Digital photograph

husband Uri. I do not scream out as did my parents. No, I whimper, squirm, change positions, vacillate between sleep and wakefulness, and write or sketch the horrors in my own Book of the Dead on the bedside table. Uri holds me; he can do little else when the images overtake me. He holds and I mark. When I glance at The Book in the morning, I marvel at the night visions. But I am not the only child of survivors who have had

these kinds of nightmares or fears. Helen Epstein (1979) wrote of how her parents' memories of the camps haunted her in childhood:

For years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew I carried slippery combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost. Ghosts had shape and name. What lay inside my iron box had none. Whatever lived inside me was so potent that words crumbled before they could describe. Sometimes I thought I carried a

terrible bomb. I had caught glimpses of destruction. In school, when I had finished a test before time was up or was daydreaming on my way home, the safe world would fall apart and I saw things I knew no little girl should see. Blood and shattered glass. Piles of skeletons and blackened barbed wire with bits of flesh stuck to it the way flies stick to walls after they are swatted dead. Hills of suitcases, mountains of children's shoes. Whips, pistols, boots, knives, and needles. (Epstein, 1979, p. 9)

Epstein and I are not alone. Other 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation survivors see and feel similar memories. Eli Rubenstein related that he

always had a feeling of something different in our house . . . but I couldn't ever really pin it down. I sensed that there was something mysterious, something peculiar about the past, about the place where I was born but I didn't know what. (Cited by Epstein, 1979, p. 24)

Traces of death. At forty, it seems almost natural. At five, it was indescribable terror.

But *now*, in the present—a new consciousness: when I am fully awake after the disruption of nightmares, I am aware not only of the recorded dreams, but of another heartbeat, another living being kicking on the inside, the same way I feel my art and writing on the inside, kicking. Kicking to get out? Or kicking with the same fear I feel in my gut whenever the dreams creep into my fitful sleep?

### **Musings on In/Fertility: Sept. 1**

I found out that I was pregnant a week ago. For years, Ari and I tried to conceive in every possible way and position. If it was physically possible, we tried it. Hell, we even tried the physically impossible—and had some good laughs about it. Well, laughter *and* tears. All those years, nothing worked. I felt like my biblical foremother, Sarai, stuck in the middle of a genealogy of men in Genesis

11, with the awful indictment: *And Sarai was barren*. Life itself seemed to be interrupted, broken, stopped by Sarai's barrenness, and I was the barren break in the continuation of my parents' life and lineage. They had survived ghettos, gas



Figure 7. *Scarcely Hidden*, 2009. Digital photograph

chambers and firing squads; they had watched their parents, grandparents and siblings fall one by one now only to have their survival end with me.

Although theologically I viewed the insertion of Sarai's name and supposed barrenness into the long list of men as the positive troubling of the

Genesis narrative whose writer left a space for the possibility of another outcome, I could not view my own life in the same way during all those years of trying, waiting, and being disappointed over and over again. Forty years old. Fifteen years of trying to conceive with Uri. Fifteen years of infertility. Metaphorically speaking, I have been through the entire desert with Moses and the clan. My hair shows strands of gray, my back aches, and my eyes have the same lines I imagine the desert travelers to bear on their faces after traveling all those years in sun and wind. But now my womb is alive and bearing fruit! And I am fifty years younger than Sarai-renamed-Sarah was at her birth experience.

I organize my classroom as though I am building a nest. I know that all the organization in the world will not last in here. Within two weeks, my art students will have taken over and the place will be a mad frenzy of activity that will refuse all restrictive attempts of order, which is what I prefer anyway. But now, just for the moment, everything has a place.

### **Anti-Semitism: September 2**

When I told my parents last week that I was pregnant, my mother was teary-eyed. "Another generation," she said huskily. "Another generation to let Hitler know that even through he drove us to the abyss and tossed us in, leaving us with the dead, we crawled out. No posthumous victory for you, bastard!" she cried, redefining Emil Fackenheim's 614<sup>th</sup> commandment of not granting Hitler a "posthumous victory" by allowing future Jews to assimilate and thus un-Jew themselves (Fackenheim, 1974, p. 32).



Figure 8. *I Dreamed You*, 2008. Digital photograph

At eighty, she has waited a long time for a grandchild. To say that she was ecstatic is an understatement.

“In the camp, I imagined you, yes, me holding you in my arms. And that was before I had even. . .before I had a lover.” This she said almost shyly!

“I was still a virgin in the camps. But I yearned for a child. The yearning for

you gave me the will and courage to pull my tired bones up every morning. I lived through several lifetimes for *you*, the you I yearned for. But a grandchild! I never even dared imagine that until you were under the *chuppah* with the ring on your hand! And I had almost given up on that.”

She hugged me—a quick, guarded hug, the only kind of hug I ever remember her being capable of giving me—a half-hug I imagine she had to settle for in the camps when the guards looked away for a moment.

My father was less than elated. He still worries about anti-semitism that raises its ugly head from time to time, still imagines that every bald head he sees on the street has a neo-Nazi maniac underneath. I learned from him to peer cautiously before I turned corners onto unfamiliar streets, to wait a long time before I invited a school friend to sit with me in the cafeteria, and God knows, to be able to recite the entire history of my boyfriends before I ever became intimately involved with them. Not only their sexual exploits, as the age of AIDS demanded, but their “Jewish geography”: their parents and grandparents, politics and allegiances. On a date, I learned to choose my words carefully, so as not to give away the secrets of my own history before knowing theirs. But if they saw my art or read my writing even back then, they knew. They knew I had seen death—death I had not actually witnessed except through my parents’ memories.

While I don’t want to accept my dad’s limited, frightened views on anti-semitism, I have to admit that there are times I probably should. A few days ago (August 30) while surfing the web, I happened to read the EYEontheUN Alert – Durban II report on anti-racism from some years ago. At the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) of Durban II, which met in Geneva, it was revealed that the UN spent ten and a quarter million dollars on promoting global anti-semitism at the Durban I ‘anti-racism’ conference back in 2001. One of the PrepCom’s moves was to set a preliminary meeting to prepare to continue to address those and other (racial) issues. When did they schedule the meeting? April 21- May 2, 2008. And what is so significant about these dates? Passover 2008 was on April

20-27 – with the first two days being days set aside as holy observances for family seders and prayers. No business as usual; no work and no conferences. So now, in the words of the EYEontheUN, “Jews the world over will now be inhibited from participating in a meeting supposedly dedicated to combating discrimination and xenophobia” (<http://www.eyeontheun.org/view.asp?l=36&p=380>).



Figure 9. *Spectral Trace*, 2009. Digital photograph

So how do I deal  
with this in view of my  
soon-to-be-arriving Jewish  
high school art students,  
and my baby? How do I  
make a mark on their lives  
when other marks are also  
being made?

### **Making My Mark:**

**September 3**

I see my marks, my  
words, my writing, my art in  
mists, as spectral and  
insubstantial curves, circles  
and lines before my face. I see them as a trace of that which came before and



will come after, for temporal forms or words can't contain them. As soon as I mark a line on my drawing pad, as soon as I write, I have drawn or written what a moment before I *will* do. The written word likewise traipses at will through temporal sites in story, poem, or article. There is no straight path, no linear chart of narrative events as they happen, will happen or have happened.

There is only the fluid waters of birth and the womb. In it, I swim in the spiraling of life as a strand of DNA that collapses my artistic marks and words backwards, forwards—all this in/on/about a present second, minute, hour or whatever form I wish to use to describe what cannot be contained within temporality.

This phenomenology of art and writing that is situated in the events of my life and in the Holocaustal traces of those who came before me, likewise curves, circles, spirals. It is never straight and narrow. It appears on my canvas, in my quilting, or through the lens of my camera as circle within circle. It almost writes itself, but I will not give it that much freedom. The poet-I likes the sound of rhyme, near-rhyme, rhythm and cadence. I read poetry to my unborn child as my mother read to me. I run in spirals with my art students to new sounds and rhythms—the music of the spheres?

Birth is always connected to death for me, a survivor's child. When I carry the other—either living or dead—in my body and soul, the responsibility is tremendous. I feel that I owe my parents *and* the dead my life. Other Second Generation children also feel a responsibility not only to family members who perished, but also towards their parents through their own accomplishments.

Anita Norich (1979) revealed that when children of Holocaust survivors achieve something in their educational or career lives, they “made it” for their parents—“not just for parents, although that’s probably the major part of it because they’re there, but to really continue the tradition and have “done them right” (Goldstein, Norich, Rosenfeld, Steinitz and Szonyi, p. 49).

Bella considered her life to be connected completely to the Holocaust; it affected how she thought and acted. The connection, like many other Second Generation children, was a dark one:

[F]amily is connected to a very painful place. There’s the difficulty: trying to give our parents the happiness, the joy that was taken away from them—which I never succeeded in doing. Constantly feeling a failure in making them happy, bringing back the light; and only in recent years I understood that it isn’t my job. That I can’t do it. But we all have this desire to make them happy, to bring the light and the feeling is always of a constant, constant failure. (Cited by Fox, 1999, p. 184)

Dina Rosenfeld’s connection and continuation was through children: “I somehow feel that it is essential that I should have children. Somehow continuity becomes much more important for children of survivors” (Goldstein, Norich, Rosenfeld, Steinitz and Szonyi, p. 52).

#### **Full Image (?): September 4**

A word of caution to you who chance to read these musings on some distant day: do not try to see every facet of my phenomenology of post-Holocaust art, writing and teaching through these mists. Do not look for the full image. Even I can’t find it. It is disguised, veiled, in hiding. Rather look through blurred eyes to the trace. The trace will lead you to the roots of words in womb,

to language rooting at the breast. By language I mean both verbal and visual image. I try to imagine the genetic, energetic, kinetic, poetic, aesthetic, prophetic spiral of familial tongues.

They are born in some labyrinthine garden, outside the gates and barbs of the camps. T.S. Eliot urged us in “Burnt Norton” (I) of the *The Four Quartets* to follow the thrush to find the children. I obey: I will go to find them, the voices of my children—the voices of the dead, the voices of the not-yet-born. Likewise I seek the image of the spiral in the primal garden where it was, is, and shall be (*v’hu haya, v’hu*

*hoveh, v’hu y’heyeh*): marked, scratched, drawn in fine sands of the earth and on sandstone cave walls, and on the soft, wet, expanding walls of my uterus. In my photograph, *Spiral*, the direction of the spiral is left for the viewer to decide.

An upward climb might lead to accomplishment, glory, enlightenment, or a breathtakingly beautiful view. Sliding downward, on the other hand, might end in failure, loss, a descent into despair—or a journey to the root of my history (personal family or collective as a Jew)—even to the ashes of the ovens or the bones of the pits. The downward spiral also can lead us to ourselves, unshackled



Figure 10. *Spiral*, 2008  
Digital photograph

by the trappings of society, culture, religion and history that keep us from self-discovery in the fullest sense. But there is another option. If the spiral is imagined as having been photographed from a bird's-eye-view, it becomes Eliot's spiral pathway in the garden that perhaps leads to the stillness of a center—a labyrinthine winding of the self to the core, to the soul, to creativity, to artistry, to the fertile union of zygote and egg. Multiple possibilities in myriad sites.



Figure 11. *Mirage*, 2009. Digital photograph

**A Poem-Song in the Middle of the Night: September 5**

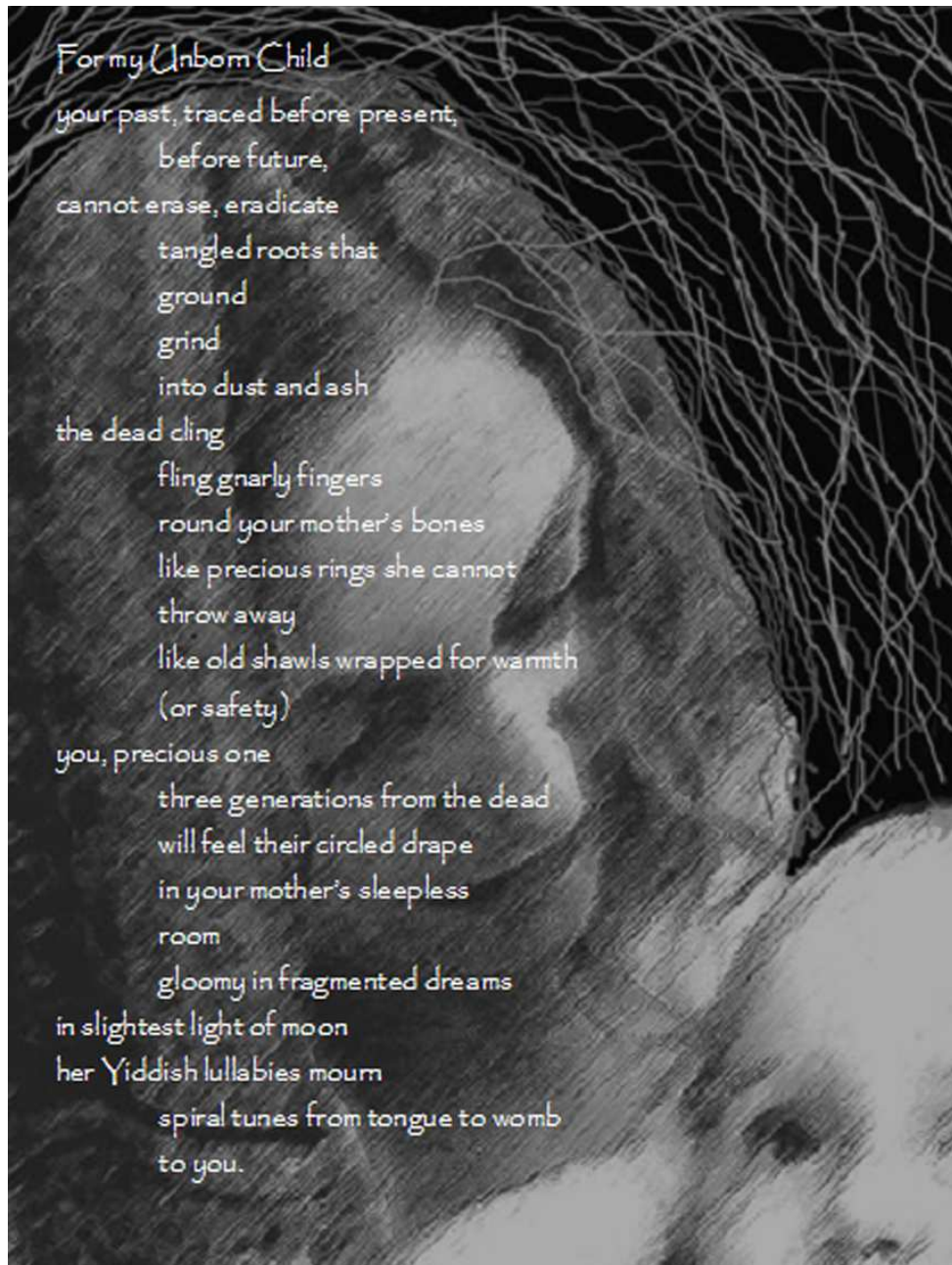


Figure 12. *Night Lullabies*, 2008. Digital photograph with markings

**September 6**

Did you feel her, my child? In darkest breaths of night? She came to me, a reflection in an abandoned window pane that has seen too many storms. I don't know her name. I only remember her as my mother's friend. No, that is not quite true. *I* don't remember her. My *mother* remembered and gently, lovingly passed her down to me. She was in the camp too, only a girl. Thirteen at most. She fantasized about gardens, about growing a garden in the middle of the barrack, of lying back on a bed of flowers instead of a threadbare blanket crawling with lice. She dreamed Eden in the middle of *gehenna*.

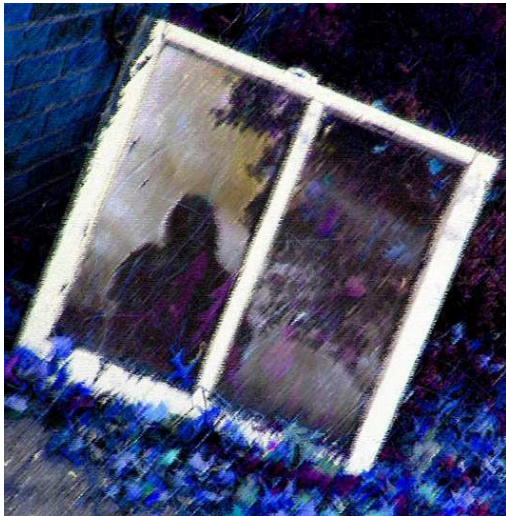


Figure 13. *There / Here*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

Even now, in my dreams, she dreams of her garden. I wonder if she haunts my mother still. I memorialized her—my unknown girl—in my art this summer. In a photograph of my own image reflected in a window that I saved from the old house, I saw her/myself appear on a dismal day when the clouds overwhelmed the blue of the sky. But she has her

garden now. I gave it to her, manipulated it thus. Here, flowers carpet the frame. She could have lain down on them to sleep. What is the commentary here? Or

there? Perhaps I am the one who yearns for sleep here in the night next to Uri while I visit *there* always under dismal skies and always without flowers.

### **Wandering in the Desert/Desserts: September 8**

I have survived the dreaded New Parents' Dessert Soiree by circling around the edge of the room, on the outermost border (as if halfway merged with the wall), balancing a lemon square on a plate in one hand and a glass of water in the other. When I described the scene to Uri, he laughed. Dear sweet Uri of the dark unruly beard and mustache—hints of grey hiding underneath. Hair that curls uncontrollably if he misses his biweekly appointments at *Vaughn's Salon*. *He's* the one, not me, he insists, who is antisocial, who runs from anything larger than six people gathered together for a casual dinner.

My fear of the unknown, whether of person or situation, is different. It has been handed down to me through my parents' distrust that manifested itself in every large gathering to which we were invited, in every walk down unfamiliar streets, in the gathering shadows of every evening when I was called in early from the freedom of the presumably safe fenced yard in our middle-class neighborhood for fear that something or someone one would "get me." Of course, the something/one was always branded with a swastika.

Fortunately, my fear does not extend to students; but having to meet so many strangers at one time forces me to cringe and retreat. Zygmunt Bauman (1995) theorized about the various ways we humans enact togetherness. He observed first a togetherness that is constantly on the move (dessert in hand?),



in which we enact a “being aside” one another—a putting up with the other since we are forced to because of our physical locations. Our loneliness, in this kind of togetherness, is never fully addressed because we do not encounter others in relationship. We exist rather in “suspended animation, of refrigerated encounters” (Bauman, 1995, p. 45). We choose to be alone in these sites, avoiding the other at all costs. We seek the solitary path rather than risk the danger of engagement.

Why do I avoid others in large crowds?  
Why do I put myself on the outskirts of the gathering? Perhaps it goes back to my father’s warnings. Don’t stay in one place too long when you’re out in public. Don’t become too familiar with those who are mere acquaintances.

Last night, I didn’t connect unless forced to by a parent who sought me out. And this despite that fact that I was in a Jewish space surrounded by Jews.

### **Middle of the Night Re-action: September 9**

Couldn’t sleep, and was afraid I’d wake Uri if I continued to toss and turn. I’ve moved to the kitchen table. Kept dreaming about my grandparents, whom I never met. They were murdered in the camps. As a small child, I didn’t understand “murdered.” And my mother then could never come up with a good



Figure 14. *Solitary Danger*, 2008.  
Digital photograph



explanation. Another 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen'er, Eli Rubenstein, remembered his own inability to understand why he and his sister had no grandparents:

Other children had grandparents and I didn't have a single one. When I asked my mother about that, she said that bad people had killed them. I didn't understand who these people were or why they would want to kill my grandparents. I wasn't aware of any connection between their being killed and their being Jewish. (Cited by Epstein, 1979, p. 25)

This is the seed of great trauma for a child of survivors, and she begins to grow within her body the fears of what it means to be killed, while not understanding in the least why it happened. It placed me on the side of "otherness" as I negotiated my position among other children my age. But there are those who, because of careless or unthinking words spoken by parents, feel actual danger in the otherness. Lucy Steinitz's (1979) own memories were ones that went beyond wonderment and settled uneasily in the crevice of fear. When she was five, Steinitz asked her mother what her father did before he came to America:

She hesitated then whispered, "He was in prison." The idea terrified me. Had my father done something WRONG? I could hardly hear anymore. Then my mother added one more sentence. "Some people didn't like the way he looked," she said. "That's why." A reasonable explanation for a five year old. As luck would have it, however, I looked exactly like my father. The thought haunted me for years. Is this the fate, I wondered, that would befall me, too? (p. iv)

Recapitulating thoughts of my own self-othering from earlier this evening with the desserts: There is a better way to re-act, of course—Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "being-for" that defies the norms and time encapsulation of whatever it is that Reason throws at our minds, sending our emotions into the site of bedlam. Bauman posited that there is no intention or motive in the "being-for" relationship,

which “simply imposes itself as a property pertaining to the very structure of this dyad of proximity”—a sudden opening up to the Other due to those things eschewed by Reason: “sentiment, emotion, feeling, passion” (1995, p. 53). “Being-for” is my chosen path in the classroom towards my students, and in the world towards even strangers. Yet “being-for” is often a lonely path, especially when I start out on my own without seeking advice (from whomever has authority—that is, I become my own *author-ity*), and without knowing if the path I have chosen is the best one for the journey at hand. But it is also then that I can attain what Emmanuel Levinas considers as the self “breaking through its form” (cited by Bauman, 1995, p. 59) and what Bauman further described as “breaking through any socially drawn form, shedding any socially-sewn dress [I love this image!], facing the other as a face, not mask, and facing one’s own bare face in the process” (1995, 59). It is the moment when I become responsible for the other (student, parent, husband, homeless person, unborn child) and act as if I have been chosen to do so. It is an “emotional relationship to the Other. . . [a] being-for [that] is . . . neutral in relation to good and evil . . . it is rather that the opposition itself, the possibility of acts being good or evil, emerges and takes shape in the history of being-for” (Bauman, 1995, p. 62). It is this relationship that Melissa Raphael (2003) insisted guided the women in the camps as they chose to see the image of Shekhinah, the female face of the Divine, in the images of each other. Raphael (2003) mentioned the biblical concept of *hester panim*—the hiding of God’s face—in relation to the Holocaust:

The face of Shekhinah was hidden only in so far as the Jewish faces that imaged her were de-faced by their profanation; burned and dispersed as ash . . . yet in women's care for the other—emblemized in the wiping of filth from a face—God's face was revealed as present and visible to the eye of spiritual perception in the facing image. (p. 55)

Women's relational care for each other informs Raphael's theological

understanding of God in the Shoah.

Through women's honoring of each other's broken, filthy bodies they remembered the other and themselves in the image of God.



Figure 15. *Hester Panim*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

When I am able to abandon myself to the emotion of my relationship with my students or with others who are in need of my “being-for,” I am responsible for them in a “bond of mutual dependency: that primal mutuality is also my lonely creation, and my lone responsibility”

(Bauman, 1995, p. 64). So where is power located here? There is no doubt that I have and maintain some sort of power in the classroom and, as parent, will maintain some level of power over my child for at least the first two decades of his or her life. Being-for entails power, for “without power, there is no

responsibility” (Bauman, 1995, p. 64). But being responsible necessitates that I define my students’ (my “others”) needs in a way that promotes their freedom with an ambiguity reminiscent of the primal moral scene. The relationship of being-for, of “the Other as the face” is situated in the present looking toward the future: “They are what they are only as a challenge to what already is and has been. They are always ‘outside’” (Bauman, 1995, p. 67). There is no certain future.

Neither can I know for certain what the future holds for myself, my students or my unborn child; I can only live towards what is ahead in all its surprises. Being-for the Other can be described in similar terms—the self expands towards the Other, never reaching the Other, but, as Mikhail Bakhtin posited, “it is only in this not-yet accomplished world of anticipation and trial, leaning toward stubbornly an-other Other, that life can be lived—not in the world of the ‘events that occurred’” (cited by Bauman, 1995, p. 68). The Other, “like restless and unpredictable art, like the future itself, is a mystery. . . [that] must be unpacked so that the being-for may focus on the Other” (Bauman, 1995, p. 69).

My students, my child, my others: mysteries. Restless and unpredictable art. I will put down my lemon square and water and the safety of the outer ring to enter into the center space of relationship with each of them. And begin unpacking.

## Making Art: September 9

On a note much different from the previous entry, I am happy to say that the students in my classes are eager to do art. I let them know from the beginning that while I can show them techniques and teach them about trends in the art world, I will not teach them “mechanical” ways to find a passion to draw or paint. They will have to un-cover whatever it is that urges them to dis/cover on



Figure 16. *First / Last Perspective*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

their own. I only ask them to open themselves and their bodies in the art room—to get dirty with art, to plunge hands into moist gray clay or into a palette of paints to mix the colors that seems to suit the vision in their mind. To “**DIE**” to preconceived notions prohibiting their art making means to travel

the path of **D**iscovery, **I**ntuition and **E**xperimentation, a flight sometimes from the purely mental faculties they use for many of their studies. Rather they must twin action with thought as they birth their art. They must be present to the art making. They must also make their own choices.

Maxine Greene (1984) wrote that “students must be brought to understand the important of perspective, of vantage point, when it comes to interpreting their lived worlds,” and also suggested that “feeling, perceiving and imagining must. .

.be given play” (p. 123). This is what I desire for my students: that they go beyond what they know to what they themselves create for themselves and their world. This is their genesis, their *bereshit* (“beginning”). I also attend to the word “play” as it is used by Greene and others. I want my students to recognize the multiple meanings of art making that put their own informed choices into action, into imaginative activity that is simultaneous serious and extremely enjoyable. I see their expressions as they play and put into play their creative musings.

Greene also discussed Dewey’s notion of mind as a verb, as “a mode of taking action, of attending [through which] an encounter with a work of art can open windows . . . outwards to alternative visions of the world . . . to break with the sense that reality is petrified” (1984, p. 124). If my students can believe in a way of being or becoming that is fluid, that fluctuates with their inquiries into their world, then their art will likewise resonate like the sound of a swiftly moving river between the walls of stony shore.

Perhaps this was my mother’s secret play in the camp—an imagination that always looked towards a future that could be seen only in the mind’s yearning eye.



Figure 17. *Fluid*, 2008. Digital photograph

## **Awakened: Just After Midnight, September 10**

Art from my Holocaust Imagery class continually flashes behind my closed eyelids like a PowerPoint slide show on the Smart Board. I have begun the class with post-Holocaust theology: Rubenstein (1966, 1992), Berkovits (1973, 1979), Cohen (1993), Fackenheim (1967, 1974, 1994), Raphael (2003), and others. But the images interrupt, intersect, interpret both the PowerPoint and my sleep. I have deliberately excluded from the class many of the images created in the camps. As a child of survivors and inheritor of their memories, I prefer the interpretive, distanced viewpoint that, while informed by survivor narratives and eyewitness accounts, layers the past with the present and future possibilities. I cannot help but find myself in these post-images; I cannot help but place myself in my own art making that relates to The Event.

My own life with parent survivors has had its difficulties, but it is by no means the worst of all lives. Toby Mostysser (1979) wrote of her own childhood of her inability to separate herself from her parents' stories as they were being told:

I couldn't cover my ears or turn away my face or even still the turmoil the words created in me. When my mother talked, her words came at me in wave after wave of pain and rage. It was as though her voice and face, driven by energies that did not belong to everyday, were disembodied and filled all the air around me. I would have pushed them away with a huge physical thrust of my arms, to make a cool and quiet space for myself. But I couldn't . . . Not until I was well into high school did I tell my mother that I couldn't listen any more, and, then, not seeing the pain I had suppressed, she accused me of not caring about her and left the room." (p. 5)

My task will be to not overwhelm my students with my own past as an inheritor of others' memories.

### **The Twins: September 10**

As I theorize phenomenologically about my post-Holocaust art making, I wonder if I should begin with the inseparable twins, Acting and Thinking, for both seem to bear on everything with which we humans engage ourselves. My life as a writer/artist is comprised of physical actions: opening the computer or securing paint and brush; clearing various books from a corner of the desk or table to make room for my tools; pushing away the various art-in-progress projects to make room for an epiphany; making a cup of coffee or pouring a glass of wine; removing the cat blanket from the sofa and fluffing the pillows; sitting; opening; arranging; beginning. Acting is simultaneously thinking as I make decisions.

New Oxford American Dictionary Entry: **Decide**: "Come to a resolution in the mind as a result of consideration." The meaning reaches backwards to roots, Middle English back to French back even farther to Latin: *decidere*, "determine"; from *de*- "off" + *caedere*, "cut." To cut one possible action from one or more others. One storyline, one character, one word, one theme, one stroke, one dot cut from another. But what if actions and thoughts are fully joined and will not allow a decisive cut? What if they cling (*devek*, Heb.) to the other possibilities like an umbilical cord that won't be severed. . .? Like my parents clung to the possibility of life after Auschwitz? Like Uri and I clung to each other in our united desire to make a child?



I think about how I prepare to make art, and I think about what I write or photograph. If a poem, what is the theme? What metaphors or similes shall I use? If a research paper or dissertation, how shall I decide from so many topics? What is my thesis? With whose voice shall I write a short story? How many characters will appear in a play? How will meaning be inscribed in a photographic image? How has all that has been written or “arted” in the past or that has been spoken about or shown in my present write itself on me?

In short, how does my thinking process get me to my first stroke of action or my action result in a thought process? The twin verbs Acting and Thinking are joined, and refuse to be parted. Both must be present to make a mark. But now, as I contemplate my own phenomenology of writing as thinking and acting writer, I choose to begin to write from my woman’s body. It is also where I begin to make art.

And these days, my pregnant woman’s body must be both heard and seen as it is being acted upon by she who dwells within it!

### **No Dwelling Space: September 11**

Can any September 11 go by without a flashback to 2001? Those images have marked themselves in my consciousness. I don’t want to dwell on them. I need the space of a decade or more, like the world did after the Holocaust. Like Jewish theologians did before they dared to theologize on the Shoah.

The students constructed an assembly to mark 9/11, to ritualize the tragedy as Jews have done throughout the centuries with other historical events

they wished to remember. The room was crowded with bodies; I chose to stand outside in the hall for fear of being crushed or swallowed up. I couldn't shake the image of a gas chamber. And I can't see an image of the Twin Towers without



Figure 18. *Two Chimneys*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

seeing the chimneys of Auschwitz. Even the chimneys on the roof of my building at school take me inside the gates of the camps where Wiesel said I could never enter.

I saw them in the early morning sun, against a brilliant blue sky. But in the re-visioning, I saw them in monotone—ash grays, mottled whites and sooty blacks. Here were the chimneys of my parents' past, standing as ominous sentinels over the campus where I now work. Standing as reminders to all who had eyes to see and understand that doubled towers and chimneys of our past spit forth human flesh as ash into brilliant blue skies.

### **My Woman's Body, Pregnant with Change: September 12**

Food doesn't taste the same anymore! Slightly over one month, and I feel the difference. My slowly changing pregnant form makes me doubly aware that the body of this writer/artist bears the constructs of biological, societal, familial, cultural imprints of woman. I am woman because of my body, and because of my thinking and orientation to my body, and because of what I put into my body

(whether it be coffee or Uri). This woman writer/artist has curves—I curve my marks like ripples in troubled water; my words curved are anything but straight and unyielding. I think here of the Robert Rossen film, *Lilith* (1964), in which the viewer sees the institutionalized female lead mostly through the rippling, moving, troubled waters of her mental obsession.

But Lilith is ambiguous; how clear a picture can we see of her through those fluid swirling waters?

These are my own flowing waters as well, tumbling over fetal material and memories embedded in my body. They are warm and beckoning; there are many

times when I take the plunge into them so that no one can see who I am. How clear a picture do I even have of myself when I am under water?



Figure 19. *Therefore: On Main Street*, 2009  
Digital photograph

### **Art from the Breasts and Womb: September 13**

My students struggle to bring forth the creativity that I suggest we all possess. Our public schools have squelched it with the prescribed art curriculum and the yearly budget cuts for the arts. Thankfully, my school values the arts. I see more and more students coming to the school with the desire to be immersed in creative experiences.

I want to guide my students to an art that spills forth. This is how I do my own art making. Poetically, I try to write words that drips milk onto the page. I pen

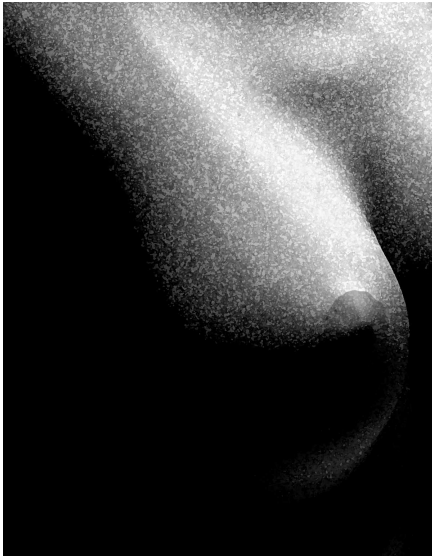


Figure 20. *From the Breast*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

sentences that wrap around the theme with embracing arms. My visual art is shouldered to bear the weight of many troubles, and back-boned to bend in the wind of ambiguity, like the palm branch (*lulav*, Heb.) that Jews use on Sukkot when we dwell outdoors in fragile booths for a week. I create bodily from the womb, and muscle the art-forms forward from the amniotic waters of formation to creation. Helene Cixous (1991), my “writing teacher” through the textual breaths and

swells of her phrases, reveals:

I don’t “begin” by “writing”: I don’t write. Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the “fundamental language” is spoken, the body language into which the tongues of all things, acts and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book. Vision: My breasts as the Tabernacle. Open. My lungs like the scrolls of the Torah. But a Torah without end whose scrolls are imprinted and unfurled throughout time and, on the same History, all the histories, events, ephemeral changes, and transformations are written, I enter into myself with my eyes closed, and you can read it. (p. 52)

This art making (Helene creates her images with words), this act/activity/activation of the flow, of the flowering (or de-flowering!) of words, this double-edged (s)word of birthing a story, an essay, a poem, a painting or a sketch, is both ecstasy and agony. A sword, yes. Sharp and reflective in its silver blade.

But must art begin with a wound? A cut? A violent tearing open of the hymen for the possibility of creating from within or from beyond?

### The Turn of the Image: September 14

I do not wish to slice open what can be coaxed, stretched, activated, or birthed by some other means. Nor do I wish to sever that which longs to remain together. I am no masochist. I begin with word or mark or lens click alone, not sword. The image (and the flesh-and-blood hand that makes is visible) is greater than the sword. The word is also the visual mark of a piece of art, whether it manifests itself as a letter or a line.

I subscribe to Cixous'

Tabernacle and Torah—of my body

(my growing breasts like the Tabernacle!). . .turn me and turn me and turn me again, for everything is inscribed within me (a reinterpretation of Ben Bag Bag's command to "turn" the Torah in *Pirke Avot*, *The Ethics of the Fathers* 5:25). Who can harm me here in this sacred place?

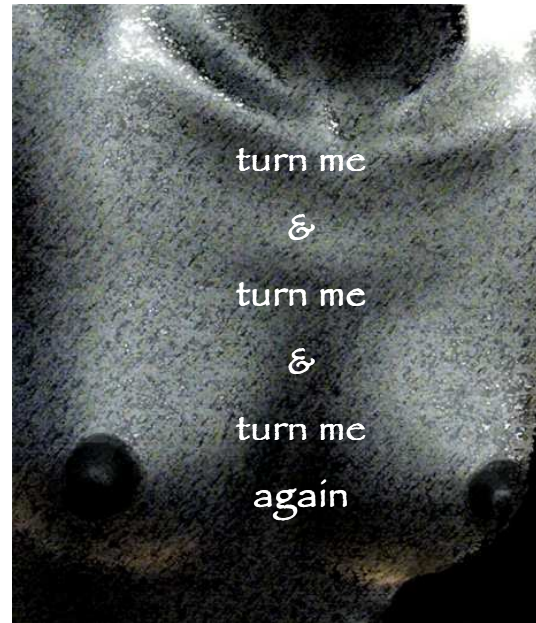


Figure 21. *Tabernacle*, 2009  
Digital photograph

## **Sacred Space: September 15**

The sacred space of the classroom. Do I make my room a sacred and safe space for my students to be creators? How do I address their fears or supposed inabilities? Do I encourage them enough when they come to me with their work? Do I present enough creative options for them to be inspired enough by one of them to step out of their conventions and conformities to attempt the unusual, the daring, the boundary-crossing kind of art I hope they will make?

How do my own notions of sacred space as it relates to my childhood affect my art making experiences? Home was not always safe; my parents' screams in the night as they dreamed of their camp experiences were torturous for me. The stories they sometimes spoke aloud to each other, not realizing I was within hearing distance, were horrific.

I am not alone in this desacralization of home as a safe place. 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen'er, Toby Mostysser (1979) wrote that she couldn't bear to listen to the stories her parents told her—"or rather the stories my mother told me, because my father generally kept quiet and had nightmares, while my mother relieved herself of the terror by speaking and, oddly, by reliving it" (p. 3). Her mother told the tales of horror, particularly those of parent-child separation: a tiny baby snatched from its mother's arms only to be splattered against the nearest wall; a small child singled out from her parents in the concentration camps and sent to the line for the gas; a father, in hiding with his young son, who abandoned him to run for his own life when he heard a search party approach; and a mother who suffocated her own

crying baby when told by those with whom she was hiding to kill it or they would (pp. 4-5). The child-Toby identified keenly with the child in every story she heard. Mostysser was ill-prepared as a child to process such stories:

Things were told to me in pieces, and events got mixed up in my head, and I put them together to create and order and coherence that were never really there in the telling or in the hearing. But the details don't really matter. What counts is that my mother and my father and their friends all told survival stories. (pp. 5-6)

How can a child, Toby or me, not take these fragmented, pastiche-tales of terror into her subconscious identity and merge each one with her own? Yet, how can the parent who has seen the terror not tell of it? Mother and daughter are tightly bound together in the thick air. There seems to be no escape from the past for the mother or progress towards a separate identity for the daughter. Both are trapped. And, through the vivid descriptions of her mother's words, the daughter will always keep a keen sense of having been there herself. I have been there myself.

### **Sacred Rites: September 16**

*The sacred rites of making art:* I think of them as I teach my students how to examine, interpret, critique post-Holocaust art. The rites of marking the page for the sake of the soul (or the body), for incorporating pastpresentfuture into the idea of art that is to be seen outside the studio by others who will interpret it through their own constructions of history, culture, presupposition, knowledge.

*Theorizing Art-Marking and Writing:* I write today about the rite of writing/drawing/marketing my page/paper with visible signs. I begin, and yet don't begin in

this present moment—the moment that breathes in this breath, that types this very word. That which seems to begin here began somewhere else, is seamed in another moment, another hour, another year, with another writer (Helene Cixous) and persons (my parents, their friends, those who are departed through violence—whose spirits float above me as unsettled starlings day and night).

Aha! See how the twins nuzzle me with their Acting, Thinking presence and open their mouths to the milk of my marking? **The rite:** the actions leading up to the word/mark. **The somewhere else:** in thoughts, memories, the camps, books, the womb. How, then, do / begin from my womb?

Womb-space. Paradoxical place: contained *and* expansive; open *and* protected—(a “matrix, a receptacle,” if one dare use the playful words of Derrida (1972/1981, pp. 159-69) about Plato’s *Phaedrus*—a feminine site of writing from outside in *and* inside out—a place that has an opening with which to cross from place to place, to exit and to enter.

Queer theory adds another dimension to my perception of normalities within societal conceptions and constructions of sites of discourse. To queer the womb as a site of writing, I recognize that there is a going in and a



Figure 22. *Womb-site*, 2008.  
Digital photograph



going out of ideas and words, that there is sometimes a desire to re-enter what has been exited, that a writer who is a man can likewise possess the womb-site of birth in order to push ideas forth (see Sullivan, 2003).

Here is the hymen that needs no cut:

We will . . . not return to dissemination as if it were the center of the web. We return to it, rather as to the fold of the hymen, to the somber white of the cave of the womb, to the black-on-white upon the womb, the locus of scattered emissions, of chances taken with no return, of separations . . . the endless multiplications of folds, unfoldings, foldouts, foldures, folders, and manifolds, along with the plies, the ploys and the multi-plications. (Derrida, 1972/1981, p. 269)

Let me stretch the metaphor. It is a swinging door, opening from either side. Never closing. Appearing to close, but incapable, thanks to its woman's biology, of actually doing so. It gives. Judy Chicago and Georgia O'Keeffe paint the folds as flowers opening to reveal inner secrets (see Chicago's *Dinner Party: Emily Dickinson Plate* at <http://raggedclothcafe.com/2007/04/11/judy-chicagos-the-dinner-party/>; and Georgia O'Keeffe's *Red Canna Lilies* at [http://www.boston.com/travel/blog/2007/11/georgia\\_on\\_my\\_m.html](http://www.boston.com/travel/blog/2007/11/georgia_on_my_m.html)).

The womb might also operate as a tomb. What if adult memories of childhood nightmares are stored within the recesses of the cave? Can anything good and new push forth out of that dark site? Better the folds of the hymen that can be unfolded like petals of a rose.

### **God's Pocket Woman: September 17**

Helene Cixous examined the positions of power and awareness in her attention to ins and outs, openings and exits in her writings. In one essay, Cixous wrote about herself as a three-year-old who imagined herself as God's "Pocket-Woman" going "in and out of his vest pocket" (1991, pp. 17-18). The adult Cixous wrote of "carving out a pass: the door, the route, wanting to go ahead to keep exceeding the language of a text" (1991, p. 23). Who allows the in and out when Helene is three? God? Another equally powerful masculine figurehead (her father)?

Cixous in adulthood has power to carve her own way. Does she need the (s)word or at least a carving knife to make her entrance into the text? Perhaps, but she also writes that "in the texts, as in dreams, there is no entrance . . . . In the text, as in the dream, you're right there" (Cixous, 1993, p. 81). I imagine that her "right there" is akin to "still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; / Neither from nor towards" in Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943/1971, p. 15).

It is the Cixous of multiple openings and non-openings with whom I continually converse as I phenomenologize my writing and my visual art as an ongoing witness to the Holocaust. The Cixous of giving, gifting, presenting in this present writing that comes from the past and meanders towards the unwritten future. The path of this writing is a figure eight, spiraling around itself in eternal time. There is no straight way to where my art and writing go.

There have been critics who castigate those of us who are compelled to address the Holocaust as witnesses removed by a generation or more from those who were eye-witnesses. They want to honor only those writers and artists who were in the camps, in the ghettos, in the forests as resisters, on the pedestal of True Memory (whose Truth? is what I want to know).



Figure 23. *Eminent*, 2009. Digital photograph

I respectfully beg to differ with those who privilege only eye-witness accounts. **I was there.** In my parents' screams. In dreams. In story after story after story. I stood in the snow, thin-coated and underfed, next to my mother, waiting for my number to be called for work-duty. I was her companion, her

friend, her mother in the camps. I slept on a rough, board bed with her and many others, scratching all night from lice bites. I gazed constantly at the lines heading to the gas, hoping never to be part of them. I saw children thrown alive to burn in the furnaces. **I was there.**

I pass back and forth between past and present in my art, and often stab a hole (ah, here is the cut that I wanted to avoid!) to peer into the imagined future. I relive each of these inherited memories in my body, bodily. This is my Exodus from Egypt. And so I make my writing and my art a rite of time-passage. A Seder of Fluid Escape.

### **Tone and Fluidity in the Womb-Room: September 18**

I began all my classes today with the deep-throated chants of Tibetan Buddhist monks. Their musical tones are fluid and octave-crossing. They bend conventional Western notions of singing with their throats. My students were in awe of the sound that enveloped the room, the womb-room that bounced sound from corner to ceiling to floor. Some described the chants as “creepy,” others as “amazing.” I felt it in my bones. The chants pierced my skin and my “knowing” ears and interrupted what we all usually listen to and call “music.” It was a rite of musical and creative passage for my young artists. Their art today pierced normality. They created their own rite of art-marking.

### **No-Time in the Body: September 19**

My own rite-ing swings the pendulum of time; bends it like a crooked sundial on a summer beach. The minutes become hours and the hours minutes. I

am right in the middle of no time (or time *there*, which is existentially non-existent). Even my choices of place and accoutrements for marking time and page are blurred in no time. The tea is no longer hot, but I don't taste it cold. The tools for marking are scattered in the usual *balagan* (mess!) of the art room, but I seem to find exactly what I need. In the rites of beginning, acts and thoughts are fluid, as in the womb, as even biological wo/man is fluid in the beginning there. Ah, I cannot separate my theory from my body, and from that human life which begins in it. Nor can I separate it from the fact that I am the daughter of survivors and carry within my body the trace of my parents' past. I am, as Kris Kristofferson wrote in his song, "a walking contraction, partly truth and partly fiction" (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/the-pilgrimchapter-33-lyrics-kris-kristofferson.html>).

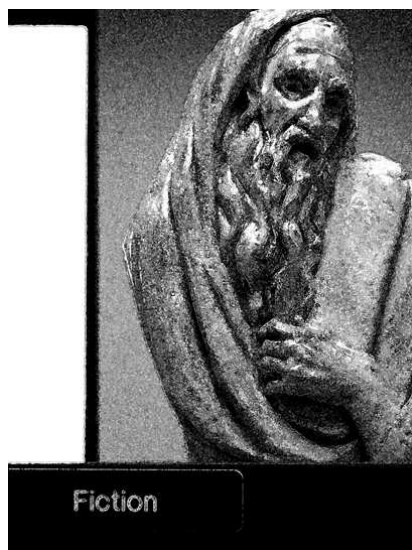


Figure 24. *Fiction*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

We Second Gen'ers are miracle children (meaning, we live despite our parents' intimacy with death and despair). We were thrust forth from the birth canal with the inherited memories of their parents' horrors. Themes of continuation and connection despite interruption and loss appear often in our narrative stories, fiction, poetry or art. Often our own identities are sewn into the garments of our parents' existence, causing

us great distress at times. Toby Mostysher (1979) wrote: "I was presented not

with a history, concrete and semi-intelligible, but with a great, gaping hole” (p. 9).

It was Mostysser’s understanding that she was expected to fill the hole that her parents and all her perished relatives left for her, a task that she, as a child, had no idea of how to do:

My mother would say, “You’re my mother to me, and my sister!” And though I wanted to turn away, I was held by guilt until, over the years, I merged with the roles I had been assigned and learned to feel more comfortable listening than speaking, at least to my parents. I didn’t know how to ask: if I was my mother’s mother, who was mine? How I was to fill the hole and with what, I never clearly understood either. I was instructed to be good and to be pretty, to marry and to have children and a house and money, and friends, but I doubt that any of these things would have filled the vacuum. I sensed that I was to create a brand new world, in the image of the old that I didn’t understand and had never lived in, only that the new world was to be solid, supporting, hopeful, and ultimately, unreal. I was to live a life of triumphs that no person ever lives. The only thing that I did know for sure was that if I weren’t careful, the hole would suck me in. (p. 10)

Mostysser’s dilemma was in trying to establish her own identity while fulfilling the role her mother wanted/needed her to fill—as both mother and sister, but not daughter. As a result, she feared that the hole of unknowing, of loss, of sadness, of no mothers, might become her own fate. Dina Rosenfeld, on the other hand, related her deep connection to her grandmother, whose identity became her own:

My Hebrew name is Serifka which was my father’s mother’s name. When I was real young . . . people would . . . ask, ‘What’s your name?’; I used to say “My name is Serifka from Orhay.” I was never in Orhay in my life, but my grandmother lived there. This was my identification—my grandmother reincarnated. (Goldstein, Norich, Rosenfeld, Steinitz and Szonyi, 1979, p. 48)

So here we all are: partly truth and partly fiction. And in good company.

## **Beginnings: September 20**

I mark beginnings at this time of the year, the beginning of the school year, the beginning of the Jewish year, but who can really know where art making begins? Eliot: "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past" (p. 13). David Lodge (1992) wrote: "Through time-shift, narrative avoids presenting life as just one damn thing after another . . . allows . . . connections of causality and irony between widely separated events." (p. 75). External time of the acts of narrative writing and visual art making (that is, daylight, early evening, or the awake-after-midnight hours), as well as internal time of the writing itself shifts, obscures itself, plays tricks on my words, strokes, and physical sense of the essence of time. My art making is further complicated by my vicarious memories of the camps. There is always the thought in the back of my head that if not for one life-saving event in the lives of my parents, I would not be here. Or that I am still in the camps, and I only imagine myself free in my thoughts.

There is also the responsibility that I feel towards my parents, whose lives seem so fragile at times—and I am not referring to their advanced age. I have always had this sense, as did Rochelle Rubenstein Kaplan:

We had to be gentle with our parents. Terrible things had happened, so terrible they didn't want us to know about them. I thought a lot about my parents. It was not as if they were the parents and we were the children. We became the parents sometimes and I didn't like that. I would throw tantrums and rebel against the idea of protecting them, unlike my brother, who was always their protector . . . . There's this deep, deep love that transcends everything. We're always trying to shield each other from pain. (Cited by Epstein, 1979, p. 37)

Kaplan's narrative suggests that because of the unspoken "terrible things" that had happened in the past, she could do nothing else but revolve her thoughts around her mother and father. She needed to treat them gently, with a reversal of roles, as if she were the parent. While she stated that her brother always played their protector, her words indicate that she did as well, despite her tantrums which perhaps stemmed from her inability to reconcile the child with the responsible parent identity she held, one that in its love for the parents and her brother, transcends all else, even her own rebellion to be just a child, responsible only for herself.

The child of a survivor tries to save her parents from the pain and trauma of their memories. In the end, I, like Kaplan, only succeeded in taking them upon myself so that they became my own.

### **Bent or Straight: September 21**

When I write, paint, or photograph in time bent (I cannot help but see Dali's bent and dripping clocks in my mind as I make this kind of art), it merges, surges as the ever-swelling tides upon the shore. Derrida (1972, 1981) describes imitator/*pharmakon* writing as



Figure 25. *Bent*, 2008. Digital photograph



“ambivalent, playing with itself by hollowing itself out, good and evil at once” (p. 139). It is a way of appearing “bent and straight.” Here is a bridge to queer theory that connects us back to Plato’s myth of the young woman Pharmacia, and her friendship with the king’s daughter as it appears in the *Phaedrus*. I give this myth a queer reading and come up with my own interpretation: Pharmacia and the king’s daughter enact and fulfill their lesbian desire.

When the king finds out, he banishes them both from the kingdom, but tells everyone that his daughter drowned. “Bent and straight”: The women have appeared to be straight, that is, heterosexual. But the king discovers them to be “bent” (another word for homosexual in the Third Reich, who put Germany’s queers (Jews and Gentiles) in concentration camps). This is the view of the fluidity of water which it was rumored had claimed Pharmacia’s life. This is a fluidity of time in writing that can render the straight bent and the bent straight. And can perhaps disrupt the verse in Isaiah 40:4: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” with the one in Ecclesiastes 1:15a that insists “that which is crooked cannot be made straight”. Multiple meanings and messages. Consider also the main character’s “bent” desire in Rossen’s (1964) film *Lilith*.

### **Word Power: September 22**

About ten years ago, a Jewish theatre company in town produced Martin Sherman’s play *Bent* (1978). I remember most clearly in my cob-webbed mind

the image (that I now double-expose through meaning) of the “bent” homosexual men in Nazi labor camps, their bodies low in back-breaking work—hauling huge stones from one end of the stage to the other at the command of SS guards. Why? For no reason but to keep them bent, broken and unable to do anything about it. Even their “bent” physical desires for each other could not be acted upon physically. The men, however, found words to be most powerful in the crossings between the piles of stones. Words alone in their still imaginative minds allowed their desire to climax without the preciousness of bodily touch. The climax of the play likewise expressed the power of the word: a guard ordered one character, first, to throw his hat into the electric barbed wire and, next, to retrieve it. The play ended as the man, understanding all too well his certain fate, flung his body onto the fence. Yet the audience’s last view was his bent body hanging limply on the fence in an eerie, intermittent bent light. Image, not word, is what remained as a trace.

#### **A Dream of Knives: September 30, near midnight**

I climbed the past few steps to the summit of a mountain, high up, almost in the clouds, with air so thin I could hardly catch my breath when I reached the top. I clutched my huge belly for fear that I would somehow lose it, lose what was within, what was growing deep within the womb. It was then that I saw the man, wizened, stooped in years and experiences, gray-white beard tangled and long. He beckoned me towards him with arms outstretched. His eyes seemed kind. I went willingly into his open arms; he appeared like the grandfather I never met,

the one who was murdered by the Nazis—gassed—years before I was born. His smile became sinister as he bound me tight with barbed wire that cut into my flesh. I bled rivers. He laid me down on a huge flat rock, and snarled maliciously as he raised six knives over my bulging, pregnant belly. The blades reflected the morning sun and formed trajectories of gleaming light—a star of David. I recoiled in horror as I realized he wanted to cut out my unborn child. In that instant, I noticed the Death’s Head pinned to his garment and the swastika shape carved as wrinkles in his ancient face. My fate was sealed. What possibilities did I have to save my baby?

#### **Morning Reflections: Oct. 1**

Was I saving my unborn child in my dream or was my dream about the survival of the Jews as a people? The old man wielded six knives—for the six million Jews who were murdered? Do I fear my inability to save the Jewish children in my classroom from assimilation, or culture, or some hideous early death through an act of antisemitism?

The dream conflates my parents’ memories of the camps with the biblical story of the near-sacrifice (*Akedah*) of Isaac by his father Abraham on Mount Moriah. I chanted the first verses of the portion in synagogue yesterday, so the melody and the words, as well as the visual image, were in my body when I went to bed last night.

There are several artists who use the image of the *Akedah* for various purposes. Sculptor George Segal used the image for political/culture

commentary on the Kent University shootings of students by police (<http://www.art-for-a-change.com / blog/2007/05/ right-here-get-set-point-fire.html>). Samuel Bak used the image to represent a disruption of the idea of God during the Holocaust in his oil painting, *Isaac's Dream* (1999). The Hebrew letters in the painting—disjointed, fragmented—spell out the word *melech*, king, but there is no king or redeemer in sight as the father and son stand on top of a mountain, hiding perhaps behind tradition and faith, while the ceaseless smoke of the crematoria ascends heavenward in the background (see image at [http://www.artseditor.com/html/december00/dec00\\_bak.shtml](http://www.artseditor.com/html/december00/dec00_bak.shtml)). My students saw the Bak painting and wondered who was to be the sacrifice. The stone and the knife are there, bundled with a rope while Abraham stands under a branch from which another rope is draped—for his own hanging, perhaps? By morning light, I construct a different vision of the Akekah:

### **LAUGHTER IS MISNOMER (Genesis 22)**

#### **One**

tandem climb  
I behind

he who seeded me into this present  
called me "laughter"  
leads me skyward – Moriah  
persistent buzzard anticipating blood  
something in the breeze absent  
rustling  
leaves  
me keening for one reason-less breath  
(catch it catch it)  
what insane voice has led us here?  
he responds (*hineni, I am here*) and journeys on

my voice disputes  
mistrusts  
suspects  
father?

Without halting *hineni bati*,  
*my daughter I am here*

here? I you are here  
(breathe breathe)  
wood fire is here  
(breathe)  
where is the lamb?  
(breathe breathe)  
we offer without offering?

ahead  
the withered sage  
rages  
under breath  
to peak  
to sky  
to earth  
under his still  
steady feet

*my daughter*

not to me behind  
(except as afterbreath)  
to some mysterious higher thing

*God will see  
for God's self  
the offering*

## **two**

stony as the crags he stumbles on  
tandem no—now juxtaposed beside me  
as the buzzard and the kill  
the crown is near—there!—on almost barren rock  
ahead and up beyond my apprehensive feet  
he sees signals his approval—there!—  
toward gravel like it was holy ground  
finds round stones, foundations an altar  
rough hands pulling, hoisting,

building higher larger  
smooth slab massive as a human  
takes bundled wood from my back  
and packs it lengthwise on the slab  
I try to see what only God and he can see  
the lamb the woman  
the woman-sized lamb  
to die upon the altar of his mind  
he catches me—  
illusioned—  
as he ties the ropes  
around the only offering he sees  
  
see myself find am I she  
I tie myself in knots

### three

lift me higher on the altar of my mind  
by now maniacal in flame  
fired see            seared seer  
who is this sage who raves above my—  
waves bladed death above my  
visible too flexible neck—  
lifts annihilating silence high  
silence of a consummately sliced lamb  
see I see him and his silver and the sun  
and God? where is your *hineni* God?  
you giver of all life lift me  
save from this stranger this “father”  
farther from this strange life lift me  
annihilate annihilate now would you me in your  
wooden stare your glare your silence  
your dead air  
holy holy wholly dead  
lift me higher  
father God damn  
this silent height

### four

emptied open revealed  
peeled of all veiled seclusion concealed in secrets of the heart  
I see the light have I returned from death?  
resurrected on your sweat or angel's tears?  
it matters not that you replace woman with ram  
the almost sacrifice now done has left us both undone

don't look upon me don't finally speak  
 I slice apart your God inscrutability  
 your father subtle enigmatic act you are mystery not family  
 you are farther than a stranger in my mind  
 in ignorance  
 in God-commanded negligence  
 I choose to blind you out blot blotted  
 from my sight and life  
 silence silent syllables deathbed nonbeing  
 is what I offer you on your sacrificial stones  
 offer no *hineni* here from this now voiceless  
 sightless not only child  
 your other "God hears"  
 child better she to be-loved by you  
 I now only mother cry  
 I only her child  
 lift lift lift now me  
 mother into life can you birth me  
 holy holy wholly  
 into hardly life

I imagine myself on the  
 sacral stone (in the camps)  
 screaming silently for the help I  
 don't find in the blood red sky (or is  
 it a black sun?). *Seared* is the  
 visioned interpretation of the poem.  
 Abraham the father becomes God  
 the originator who becomes  
 Mengele, the Angel of Death. I am  
 Isaac. I am my mother. I am all women murdered at the hands of the Angel. I  
 bleed into the air and every tree mourns.



Figure 26. *Seared*, 2008. Digital photograph

## Night After Atonement: October 9

Yom Kippur, the Day of Communal Atonement. At-one-ment. With family, friends, and colleagues. The community of *Am Yisrael* gathers together to confess communal sins, to ask for forgiveness, and to pledge to do *t'shuvah*—a willing act of return to the spiritual site before sin. On the night before Atonement, we repeat the questions: Who will live and who will die? Who by water and who by fire?

As soon as those words were chanted today, I, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen-child-of-survivors, was transported into the darkness of *those* days behind barbed wire. I couldn't help myself there in the chaos. I was in time before my physical time, and yet was simultaneously *in* and *after* the present.

There in the synagogue, in the midst of worshipers and my memories, I crawled into the dark womb tidal-wave of muffled words of prayers, poems and possibilities of art making, and swam with my own future child (that is, art and human embryo): "It is in the darkness that our inner vision becomes most powerful and our tactile sensitivity becomes most acute," wrote William Akers (2002: pp. 58-59). I felt marked, worded, sculpted on my tongue, my fingers, in my womb.

My art-markings after the break-fast were formed in that pregnant sea. And my own pregnancy? My multiple and fluid state of affairs, my "womanly condition," is a choice, not an imposition, not a gender issue. There is nothing I can accuse for these marks: no act of violence, no forced entry, no rape that



demanding or cut an opening. (Here I hear again the muffled cries of those whose stories my mother told—young girls beaten/raped/invaded by others of power in the camps). Neither is there an individual act of intercourse through lovemaking that I can blame or thank for the art (Uri, bless him, does not always inspire me to write or make art!).

There is this *and* that, these *and* those. In my art making, separation, classification, identification is neither needed nor desired. I myself am wriggling spermatozoon teeming with ideas, ecstatic with the thought of impregnating. I am ovum, waiting impregnation. I am zygote rejoicing in the being-in-the-state-of pregnant expectation. I penetrate and am penetrated. All these acts result in fertility. I hope to birth life into empty space (a page, a canvas, the image card on my camera). I visualize my past-present-future through my art, my child, and ever-present memories.

### **Exhausted Art Making: October 10**

My students arrived at each class today listless and yawning. One evening did not give them enough hours for a complete rest from all the praying and fasting on Yom Kippur. Their art did not come easily; they seemed to have to force creativity out of themselves. For some, the art they delivered seemed premature. One of my fears is not carrying my baby to term, of my body aborting the precious life I hold, of expelling it without movement or sound. I have waited too long, I sometimes think, to have a child. My body, which in years past could not conceive, now gives me the hope that my child will continue to grow, but at

the last minute, will snatch it from my womb and throw it into some pit of human debris. Who shall live and who shall die.

My child disappears like my other relatives whose faces I don't remember, having never seen them.

I have the same fears about my art. I wish not to abort, not to transport a dead creation to visual light without possibility of revival. Yet, sometimes there is the lifeless thing that doesn't move, that appears small and faint and without breath before me (particularly the insubstantial piece of art). This other-than-living art imprints my body with pain, failure, incompleteness. I mark and am marked with this experience of birthing nothing. I despair in the loss.

I do not want to erase the possibility of either text or mark—to render it lifeless—if I can help it live. My desire is to birth a marking which is neither an end, nor a beginning. It is not linear process, but ever-changing, variable experience, a pattering along many possible pathways. A spiraling (Latin, *spira*, “coil”) that engages and weighs all possibilities, that refuses to say only one is right, the other always wrong; that sees the slipperiness of the



Figure 27. *Disappearance*, 2008  
Digital photograph

divergent path and the ripples in the water that is only sunlight. It is a feminist and queer way of seeing, thinking, creating. It is highly disturbing, troubling to the artist/writer-I, for I cannot always trust my own vision and constantly changing meaning.

Yet I seek no easy path. Trouble the words, the page, the poem, the story, the play, the canvas, I say. Trouble my Acting and Thinking writing/art making body! (The Black spiritual “Wade in the Water . . . God’s gonna trouble the water, children!” (<http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/wadeinthewater.htm>) comes to mind and slips onto my tongue. I segue easily into “Bridge over Troubled Water” (composed by Paul Simon, 1969; sung as a solo by Art Garfunkel, 1970; <http://sglyrics.myrmid.com/bridge.htm#track01>). I’m sure I’ll be singing both songs all day.

*Disappearance* is a photograph I shot of myself reflected from the ceiling of the aluminum-clad elevator. I reduced the image using a threshold setting until my features disappeared. Only the trappings of my garments remain. My parents told stories of their relatives and friends who mysteriously disappeared before the transport, and others who dropped from sight in the camps, leaving only ragged piles of clothing behind. My mother also used to read me a nursery rhyme about a mother who wanted her children to be clean, and washed their faces so frequently that their features disappeared. Imagine the effect this seemingly benign poem had on me as a child—trying to comprehend such a disappearance in light of stories of my parents’ disappearing friends and relatives.

### **Embodied Ritual—Building the Sukkah: October 14**

The holiday of Sukkot begins this evening. For the past few days, students have been constructing a *sukkah*, an outdoor structure made of natural material. They use their muscles and their brains as they determine the positioning of posts and cross-timbers, as they cut branches to cover the top of the structure—just enough to allow the evening stars to be viewed. They engage their aesthetic abilities as they decorate the *sukkah* with paintings of biblical personalities, hanging fruits, or decorations from each of the student houses. Some students will eat meals and sleep in the *sukkah* as a way of fulfilling the commandment to “dwell” in it.

The *sukkah* models the frail dwellings of the people of Israel as they crossed the desert for forty years after the exodus from Egypt, or, later—when they were in their own land—as they slept in it to be near their closely guarded and soon-to-be-harvested fields. The wandering in the desert is how I imagine my art making. Desert-time is clarity in the midst of blinding windstorms, daytime heat despite the frigid nights, loneliness even when a caravan of family members is in attendance.

I build a *sukkah* of words and images as my thoughts wander this afternoon. I wonder if my *sukkah* will be substantial enough to dwell in. Colm Toibin (2004) described Henry James’ patterns of wandering in his mind as well as in his body through the streets, gardens, hills, and canals of various cities and countries as he reimagined his characters (based on acquaintances) wandering

the pathways as well: “There were scenes he wrote in which, having imagined everything and set it down, he was, at moments, unsure whether it had genuinely happened or whether his imagined world had finally come to replace the real” (Toibin, 2004, p. 107). The art of the masterful marker (whether the marks be words or art) jaunts down the various paths, until one looks and seems like another, and the marker soon finds herself lost in the act. She spirals as she marks. She is a coiling serpent of the winding, twisting lines that appear on the page. She slyly slits her eyes to see around the bend: which way to slither?

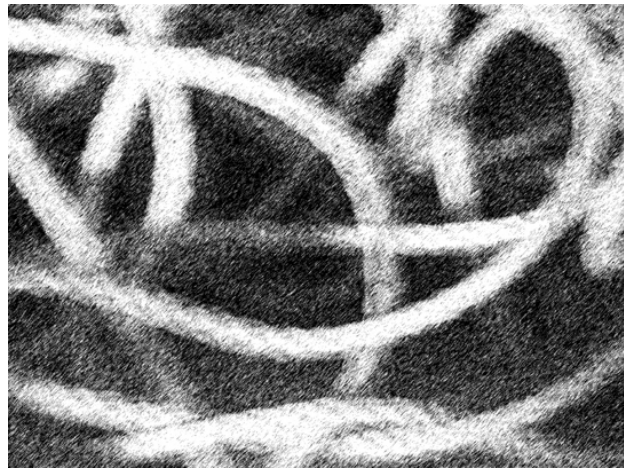


Figure 28. *Snaked*. 2008. Digital photograph

Spiraling allows me to avoid an etched-in-stone progression, the always-the-same essential steps when I create. Rather, I experience certain “rites” that appear not in orderly fashion, but flitter as the thrush in Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” that bids me follow until I can hear the children laughing—even though Eliot describes the laughter as being “hidden.” My children, my marks, my stories, my interpretations. *Bereshit*. New beginnings from the old narratives of my parents. “There was evening and there was morning.” A new narrative. And the writer/artist-I hopes some god calls it “good.”

My *Snaked* photograph is open for interpretation. I presume there is a possibility of both creation and destruction in it. For both Eden and Auschwitz.

### **Memories and Meaning: October 16**

I asked my students to consider the multiple meanings of the word “memory” before we attempted to go further in our interrogation into Holocaust art and vicarious memory. We discussed how memories enter our consciousness without our bidding, in dreams or by reminders of sight, sound, smell. Memory is ambiguous and fluid. My students are wrapping their brains around this. Mostly, they think of memory as a tool to recall what they’ve studied the night before for a test! I shared with them that I have engaged with my own memories of my parents’ stories since I was a child, so any expanded theory of memory has already been part of my lived experience. These memories of the events of the Shoah—that aren’t part of my actual experiences—are my identity, my memory, though not my reality. My students have also remarked that there are some stories they have heard survivors tell that stay with them, so the memory of another is somehow now traced in their own minds as though it was their experience.

One story in particular: a single cherry found on the side of a path taken daily to work camp duty. Where were the rest? Gone to a German home, no doubt, with someone outside the camp. Someone free, with a belly full of food. But this one cherry remained for the woman who found it, plucked it, and re-tasted a before-camp memory. This narrative becomes my student’s vicarious

memory. She could almost taste it as she traced it into art. In turn, a bowl of cherries became my dream that night. As I photographed it and edited it later, I saw the tiny form of a ghostly dancer holding a hand drum (near the upper left rim of the bowl) and a single reaching hand (on the upper right), created by the play of light on glass. How unexpected and queer that my dead show up even when uninvited.



Figure 29. *Dreaming Cherries*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

Nietzsche considered the idea of humanity carrying the memory of all past generations as too cumbersome and impossible a task; he dismissed memory for imagination. I wonder where my own memory and imagination converge? What do I “remember” that was not part of my parents’ narrative? That was conjured in nightmares, fears, and clandestine thought processes?

Inherent in some of my parents’ stories are the pauses, inconsistencies, slippages, blank pages—their own forgetfulness—no doubt from the chains of the past rather than the present, unless the present is understood as holding survivors in the patterns of the traumatic past. The metaphors for the actualities of undernourishment, filth, disease and death become overwhelming, and they

just forget. Or bury the memories until they appear like the dancing dead on the cherry bowl, unplanned for and unannounced.

### **Something New: October 17**

I feel good today. Woke up rested and ready for something new. I have yet to experience the dreaded nausea that I suppose will rear its head in the coming weeks, but today, I am well. Bring on the new day! The new year! The cycle of recurring holidays, holy days—days of remembrance and re-mem-bering.

### **After Havdalah, October 18**

I ended Shabbat with friends who live close to downtown in a lovely house in a part of town that is slowly moving from drug haven to chic restorations. My friends' house is situated across from a park that is still known for its "transactions." Perhaps to overcome whatever might have been passing between hands in the shadows of the trees across the street, we chose to take braided candle, spice box and wine cup out onto the porch that faces the park for our ritual marking the end of Shabbat. We passed the spice box and wine cup between our hands, and held the bright flame of the twisted candle high into the dark night. Then we wished each other *shavua tov*—"a good week"—in song. We even sang to my belly—a new ritual, no doubt.

Raymond J. Rodrigues (1985) suggested new metaphors for marking experiences (he mostly wrote about the written word) that are not linear processes: "Hybridization. Mongrelization . . . They imply a strengthening of the



genetic pool, a willingness to create something new, and a selection from a variety of attributes, all potentially good” (p. 26).

I don’t usually like discussions of the genetic pool, particularly in light of Hitler’s use of eugenics, nor the word “selection,” but if we are talking about the evolution of one’s craft, then I can bear them. When I look into Eliot’s “drained pool” that is “dry,” “concrete,” “brown-edged”, yet is “filled with water out of sunlight” in which “the lotos rose” (p. 14), I see that mark making in art and writing is a conjurer—a magician that allows me to experience my life again, anew, in marking on a page.

Norman Mailer (2003) wrote that “on very good days, when our work is at its best and keeps revealing insights that you never knew were in you, it is not difficult to recognize that writing may also be a species of magic” (Mailer, 2003, p. 230). I can describe what was and is no longer (such as concrete memories) except in writing and art, or what may be remembered or visible imaginatively at one moment but not the next. I can see the pool that is no longer there, the waters of birth that, though past, still stream forth. I can see dead European Jews alive. “Spooky,” is how Mailer describes writing. “There is no routine of an office to keep you going, only the blank page each morning, and you never know where your words are coming from, those divine words . . . Maybe it is no more than blind will” (Mailer, 2003, p. 70).

## Blind Marks? October 19

My belly seems to be bulging this morning. I'm sitting in bed, gazing down at it. Uri sleeps still. On the weekends, he doesn't stir until 9 or 10. I can never sleep that long, especially now that I'm pregnant. I sip from a juice box that I placed on the bedside table last night. My morning rites of coffee have seen two months of willing deprivation for the sake of my child, but the juice is good. Roused me into starting up my laptop to write, and here I am, marking away.

I remembered my last thoughts of the evening in fleeting thoughts upon waking. I just reread my entry, and am now trying to interpret it for my own practice—and to take it into my classroom. If I take Mailer's suggestion to the canvas or the page, I mark blind, blurred, unable and not requiring to create with clear sight from the beginning. I begin in a site of incomplete senses, as with



Figure 30. *Appearance of a Face*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

unaccustomed eyes at nightfall. I can't see and don't know what lay ahead, around the curve, the bent path, the end of the story. My photograph, *Appearance of a Face*, is one of those blind endeavors. I took it the other night, in the rain, as I was pulling up to the end of the

driveway. The trashcans (regular and recycling) were ready to be rolled down to the curb, and the halos of light around them from the car headlights caught my attention. Not until I adjusted the light levels in my computer and brought the halos down to an almost eye-shaped control of light (that also looks strangely like the outline of my car) was I able to see the face in one of the cans. The dead again.

Still the will and desire is to birth, to push forth. My rites of writing and art making are in some sense nonsense, queer, engaged in from the site of the continuously moving spiral. I can take them from a beginning that is experientially middle *or* end. For the sake of some clarity—for this phenomenology which I examine here is far *from* clear, but rather is as cloudy as a newborn's eyes in first bright light—I will start with a beginning-middle-end. In a fluid chaos of memory and imagination. It is my jump backward into womb waters. Into memories floating in darkness. Into the tomb of Auschwitz.

The seduction here for me are those remembered moments of "I've been here before, I know this thing, this experience, this person from another distant time and place." The moments might be nightmares or dreams of a kinder nature. They surface sometimes in dreams, or in the act of creating (particularly when I work intuitively), even rarely in face-to-face contact. Many times they come as recurring nightmares of apparitions from the camps—demon-spawned forms similar to the ones about which Mostysser (1979) wrote that in her childhood there

were unearthly, larger than life figures, whose archetypal malice was the malice of all humanity. As my mother mythologized evil, she made it palpable and immediate. The moral of her stories was absolutely clear: don't reach out, don't trust . . . the sheer evil that was presented to me as reality, and presented so fiercely, threatened to engulf me. It was always a fight for me, a struggle against my parents and against parts of myself, to press through the demon-filled isolation that I found myself in to the other world of sunshine and people, where I could play and laugh and be easy. (p. 7)



Figure 31. *Apparitions*, 2008.  
Digital photograph montage with markings

But whenever my demons appear, I am forced to consider a different sort of phenomenology—one in which my mind/soul experiences and remembers what my body does not (or vice versa).

Perhaps this is Plato's soul-journey as elucidated in the *Phaedrus* (246A-247E), or the Tao's wisdom which can be known intellectually, but experienced without intellect—a phenomenology of experience without intellect as we think about it:

Look, and it can't be seen.  
Listen, and it can't be heard.  
Reach, and it can't be grasped.  
...  
Approach it and there is no beginning;  
Follow it and there is no end.  
You can't know it but you can be it,  
At ease in your own life.  
Just realize [remember] where you come from  
(Trans. S. Mitchell, 1991, p. 14)

As a child of survivors, I cannot forget where I came from. It is always before my eyes like a *shiviti* (an artistic rendering of the Hebrew words of Psalm 16:8, "I have set (*shiviti*) the Lord always before me." My *shiviti* takes the form of spirits in the night—which I sometimes see as images of myself. Some scream in terror, others look demure or confused. These are my parents' nightmares passed down to me. My ghosts.

### **Imprint Me as a Seal: October 20**

The Song of Songs, *Shir haShirim*, speaks of a love that is so deep, so lasting, that it is as if one lover had imprinted the other into the very heart of desire and love (8:6). This is a love that transcends the physical act of love-making; it marks itself on the soul of the other.

I think of the tattoos on my parents' arms. It was hate that put them there, but it was love for each other that helped them transcend the memory of burning flesh. Even so, they were tattooed over and over again as each experience marked itself on their bodies, in their psyches. I too, I am tattooed without visible markings. I am a document of my parents' past written again and again on my body and soul until the words are blurred and covered with subsequent words. Who can read me? I am untranslatable, like the stories I heard in the night—bits and pieces that couldn't be connected, that were overlapped and overwritten with other stories. Nothing makes sense. I am like Ruth Liberman's "authentic document" art in which she copies original text from war documents with her own hand, then turns it into abstraction by repeating the same text over and over on top of the original:

[B]y partially withholding the legibility and context of the texts that I use, the task of interpretation becomes excessive—there are either too many possibilities or too few . . . the confrontation with illegible text creates a desire to read and know—more than does a clearly printed text . . . When it is altogether illegible it draws attention to our expectation that writing ought to be a transparent medium. By withholding its direct communicative content, in the end, what has become public actually remains private. (Liberman, 2005, pp. 100-01)

I asked my students to write a sentence about the Holocaust on a sheet of paper. Then I asked them to write over it, again, and again. The remarks ranged from "Nobody will be able to read this," to "I don't want to cover up my writing." But they acquiesced and persevered. When they saw Liberman's art ([http:// www .nyu.edu/pubs/counterblast/issue1\\_nov01/issue1 .html](http://www.nyu.edu/pubs/counterblast/issue1_nov01/issue1.html)) projected on the Smart

Board, and heard her own interpretation of her art, they understood. Some of them explored the exercise further in their journals. This is when I see that what students do in class can stay with them for further investigation. There it is! Their own markings over markings over markings. Layered interpretation.

My own attempt of layering is titled *Re-Written*. I explore my mother's stories as if they were my own written over her words and her camp-body.

Likewise, the typed words are repeated over and over, and partially appear cover the woman and partially disappear into the background stripes. I try to understand how my thoughts are bound to my mother's; which are independently my own original ones? And are my original thoughts nonetheless written over her narration, which may cause her thoughts and words to disappear forever?



Figure 32. *Re-Written*, 2008. Digital photograph and text

We are out of school again for the culmination of the fall holidays in the joyous holiday, Simchat Torah. In the synagogue, all the Torah scrolls are removed from the ark on the eastern wall of the sanctuary and held by various members of the congregation as they dance with them as if with the Shekhinah, the divine female presence of the Divine. Also within the traditions of this holiday come memories of King David dancing joyously and unselfconsciously (much to the chagrin of his wife Michal) before the Ark of the Covenant as it was carried into Jerusalem.

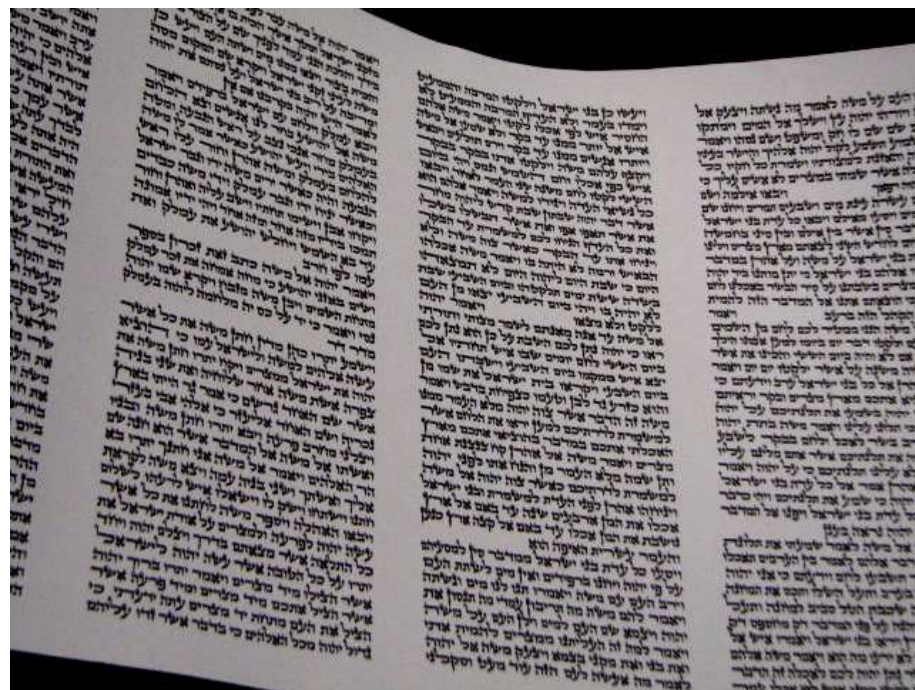


Figure 33. *White Spaces Unrolled*, 2008. Digital photograph



Some congregations unroll the entire scroll to see its beginning and end as a ritual that shows how, when circled around the synagogue in its unrolled form and held aloft by men and women, the scroll becomes a living, continuous document within the congregation that never ends. In fact, the tradition of reading the very end of the book of Deuteronomy followed by the verses at the beginning of Genesis makes a ritual act out of the meaning.

I remind myself that my memories are not beginnings, that they are sometimes illusions or at least insubstantial ghosts of some past reality. They are more akin to the cycles of the year and of Torah readings, in which end is beginning. I remind myself again that what is *now* seems more real than what was *then*, but what *seems* to be is not necessarily so. I write myself into paradox and ambiguity. And so, I call on Imagination, that mirrored element of some image I have blurrily seen in twilight or predawn mists. That which comes from somewhere else to attach itself to *my* womb to be birthed entwined with cord umbilicalled lived experience—always connecting me to the mother memories of another womb. It is that about which I can say without doubt, yes, that happened to me. (I was there in Germany in the war years.) Imagination boils her cauldron of conjuring and mirrors experience. (I was the wide-eyed, hungry one locked behind the barbed wire. I ate the muddy water they called soup because my mother ate it). I dream of fires: David's soul that burned with the flame of the Divine, the burning bush that was engulfed with the fire of the Holy but did not burn up, and those unholy fires that burned the bodies of my relatives in the

camp. My dreams are like the sunlight water in Eliot's empty pool, or the deep unsettling darkness of a moonless night. My dreams beckon Imagination. I write her fluid and rippling. Sometimes I call upon her directly; other times she slips in unseen through my rites.

I have told my students about my own creative rites, contingent on mood, task, situation. If alone at night in summer, I sometimes create (write or draw) by



Figure 34. *Dreams of Fire*, 2008.  
Collage, digitally manipulated

candlelight, rarely a single flame, but many colors circled on the table in front of the sofa in which I sit—left corner by the window. I can hear cricket-rubbings outside. They write me on. If sitting in the midst of activity, at a coffee shop or the library, computer or sketchpad on the table in front of me, I mark and watch simultaneously. I watch for that which I can weave in at a later time, for the common and

uncommon observances of lives lived and rooted in front of me. I listen. I hear the little conversations, the boisterous greetings, the tepid arguments that never reach a boiling point in that public place. I allow distractions; I permit my eyes

and ears to flow with the stream of people passing by. Sometimes. Sometimes I create in emptiness and silence.

Sometimes I sit with pen in hand or with computer on lap or tabletop. I can just as easily mark my life by clacking away on black keys with white letters that show up on the screen as black letters on white page, or forming symbols in a notebook within lines or as twisted roots. I also engage in rites of words and images while walking and

swimming. There is something about the rhythmic movement of my body that creates the hidden laughing child (the child that is able to play without constantly seeing ghosts or is able to offer them hospitality and an invitation to dance). These insubstantial rites in movement must be remembered—stored some place in my body—until I can incarnate them. These are the ideas that seem sometimes to be

lost, aborted. I cannot always bring the child forth in timely fashion or form. But then, when I least anticipate the act, a strand, a trace of an incomplete line, links



Figure 35. *Twisted Roots*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

itself to my story, appearing on the page. This is the unexpected birth. Like my own child's unexpected conception. Like my own in my parents' mind. Within the possibility of interruption and sterility—the great cycle of life continues.

*Twisted Roots* haunted my eyes for months before I parked the car on the side of the road and got out to photograph it. This massive tree is woven with its own roots that sprouted and sent up thin and pliant limbs in which to wrap the trunk. After adjusting levels of light within the image, I saw the faces in the tree, hiding behind the branches, pressed close to the bark of the trunk. Who are they and why or what are they are hiding? What manner of events have interrupted their lives?

### **The Curve of the Day: October 23**

This month has been difficult with all its mandate interruptions. I am not bemoaning the *chagim* (the Jewish holidays), let that be clear. But there has been no continuous flow (as in the readings of the Torah from week to week and year to year) in my teaching. Throughout the month, my students and I met for one day (Monday), were off for the holidays on Tuesday and Wednesday, then came back to try to finish up the week with some semblance of intention. How my students have successfully birthed any art this month is a mystery! Then again, some births are not planned on a weekly calendar and are not formed in biological stages. I wrote before (I can't remember when) that I cannot always plan ahead for the "end" of a story, poem or work of art. I tend to create intuitively. But not always. There are some creative endeavors that are crafted, in

advance, through copious notes, drawings, trips to the library or street or coffee shop or woods. I match character to name to appearance to—. The list goes on, snaking its way in whatever curvaceous manner it wishes. Real writing from the body, like the body, has curves. My photograph, *Curves*, show a dancer, her flexible leg extended upwards. But at what cost is her flexibility? The photograph also shows a scar across her lower back, a mark of some sort of suffering. I must be willing to suffer for my art, particularly as it stands as a witness to my parents' past in the camps.

So here, right now, in the space between two classes, I raise a glass of water (no wine until after birth and breastfeeding) to twisting, pasting and taking apart everything (including memories) that leads to creativity—serpentine tasks that bring me something that can be referred to as wisdom through examination and hard, shvitzing work. Creativity that *only* flows flawlessly must be suspect—from where does it come?? Is it demon seed, planted in the Platonic mind/soul/intellect by something previously heard, read, or experienced? For me, the flowing is fine if it comes, but I don't attribute it to a masculine Divinity. Give me Shekhinah! Give me the spirited Lilith, muse of the



Figure 36. *Curves*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

feminist writer, who helps me twist, paste, pare and reassemble my (whoring?) thoughts. And yet, I won't erase the idea of God. There is always the trace, fuller-bodied that I sometimes imagine it to be. A kabbalistic entwining of the feminine and masculine qualities of Divinity. Another ambiguity: despite my deliberate twisted planning, acting and thinking, I still wonder what will be birthed.

#### **Pre-Birth: October 24**

**First: *IT'S A GIRL!*** And she looks and acts like she's doing fine, according to all indications and the tiny ultrasound photograph I have of her. *Baruch HaShem*. Much of my time is spent thinking about the birth of my daughter—particularly as I experience the phases of bodily changes (I will refrain from writing about this in detail here!). But tonight, as I near the end of my first trimester, I realize that I am taking all the birth stories of friends into my consciousness, and writing their experiences into my own body: I tremble when their stories are particularly frightening; I relax when I hear their birth experiences were easy, “a piece of cake”. My doctor continually allays my fears by telling me that my experiences can only be my own and not those of others' narratives.

**Note:** My doctor didn't grow up with survivor parents; she doesn't understand how another's experience can be passed on as a horrifying inheritance. But thus far, all is well. My baby is growing as she should.

#### **Out and In: October 25**

Pre-birth thoughts press against my bladder and my brain, not only about my child, but also my art, and my students' practices of bringing forth their ideas.

But what is the birth of art? Where does it come from? I wrote before that there is beginning before beginning. A pushing forth of new thoughts, words, images that seem to heart-beat into life beginning with the belly cry of first breath forced from lungs. No. Go backwards, wind the trace even further back to the womb words and images in formation, to the mother's exterior murmurings heard within. A comforting echo of song and longing for the unborn. The creator-I feels the rhythms of the mother tongue and eye in the growing fetus. The pulse, heartbeat, opening/closing of eyelid, swell of crooned lullaby, words, lens, brush. So this is the beginning? No, spiral in memory even further back before the womb, to the passion to create, to love. Backwards yet again to connect yourself to experiences and narratives of hundreds of thousands—no, much more than that—connected lives. I feel the others in psychic ways, but I can only imagine what I sometimes experience as *déjà vu*. Is this the biblical idea of *tohu va'vohu*, formlessness and void? I float forward to swim in the womb, in the buoyancy and the murmured words and subtle shadows from outside in that send me traces of the past.



Figure 37. *Inside and Out*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

The cry of birth, then, is not beginning, end or middle, but rather a fluid motion of traversing between them all to re-begin

again and again. The stories my mother and father told me as they held me close: life before Hitler, aunts and uncles, cousins I never met, tales from the camps, myths and fables, stories and poems from the fears, hopes and loves of their experiences, narrated in to the child in their arms. This child-I watched language on their tongues with cloudy eyes, heard the stories, the songs, the buoyant, swimming words, phrases that moved between present and past and future. Hannah Arendt wrote that

mastering the past can take the form of ever-recurrent narration . . . . The narrative has been given its place in the world, where it will survive us. There it can live on—one story among many. There is no meaning to these stories that is entirely separate from them. (Cited by Skoller, 1993, p. 16)

While the writer/artist-I has no desire to master any past, I will affirm, embrace and converse with it, so as to assist the survival of the narrative and the on-going, ever present act of my creative acts and my parents' languages.

Eleanor Honig Skoller (1993) posited:

We both discover and invent experience through the telling, the writing of experience. The emphasis is on language, on writing, not as an instrumentality but as the way the world—and the subject of writing—is constituted and known . . . . as we live in the world, the way we come to know that world is in a delaying, deferring process (difference) that is writing, that is always a scene of writing. (p. 17)

I invent the experience of creating as I engage in research through writing and art. My experience can be compared or contrasted with another's, and, although it is assumed by others that it can be mine alone, I know (as a child of



survivors) that this is not necessarily so. I invent my own experience from my parents' stories, family narratives—from in the womb and out.

### **Writing on the Tongue: October 26**

I will present three papers this coming week at an educational conference in Savannah. Writing and art making loom like all-encompassing tasks in my mind just as the reality of my pregnant belly looms in clothing that no longer fits me.



Figure 38. *Myopia*, 2008. Digital photograph

I (by sheer force of the thought and act of the mark) “will” words and images to well up, and they spill onto the page. There is history here. In my first childhood home: built-in bookcases of hundreds of books that I removed from their places, leaving gaps in the shelves. I invented more stories to fill the empty spaces. I have always lived with words before my eyes and in my ears: seeing the

words after hearing them; seeing to write. Or is it writing to see?

Maybe I have written to see; to have what I never would have had; so that having would be the privilege not of the hand that takes and encloses, of the gullet, of the gut; but of the hand that points out, of fingers that see, that designs, from the

tips of the fingers that transcribe by the sweet dictates of vision. (Cixous, 1991, p. 4)

Cixous, too, saw and wrote with blurry, myopic eyes. Oracle with hand and finger vision.

I write from the body. The pre-birth I remember most vividly is the experience of the “cave drawings.” I was perhaps three, in a new home my father and mother had built, in a newly painted bedroom, with crayons and creative desires. *Tabula rasa*, those white, empty walls! They begged me to mark my surroundings, my cave of c(r)aving to ca(r)ve—with my sword?—out of a visual nothing—something. I closed the door, closed myself into my carvings. Why, I am not sure. Did I think I was doing something wrong? I don’t think so. Perhaps I felt I needed privacy. To be alone? I don’t remember. When my parents discovered my artful markings, their first reaction was less than positive. Later, they brought their friends in to see my art/marks/primal drawings/writings. That cave was as much their doing as my own. They spoke fluid words, disseminating syllables that spilled and spiraled from their own tongues down to ten small fingers grasping stubby crayons against the expansive tablet of the wall. I had only to efface the nothingness with faces—mouths wide open—and fingers and feet. I wonder how much of what I marked on the wall was from their/my nightmares—indeterminate with my child-hand? I remember that my parents repainted the walls after a while. Did they finally recognize their own nocturnal screams?

Deborah Brandt (1994), in her study of literacy, found that early memories of writing occurred “out of the eye of adult supervision . . . often involving feelings of loneliness, secrecy, and resistance” (p. 461). It seems highly possible that my cave activity was my retreat, my resistance to my parents’ constant narrative fears. Here, in the safety and privacy of my cave, hidden from Nazis, dogs, searchlights and the dull ache of a hunger I didn’t understand, I perhaps thought I was marking my own space, my own tablet, my own *safe* history.

I imagine that if I had tried to gain my parents’ permission to form my symbol drawings on the walls, I would have been denied. They would have handed me paper instead. But paper is so small. There is always an edge, an end, a boundary. I imagine that even if I had tacked my paper to the wall, or placed it on the floor, I would have transgressed the boundaries of the page. I would have gone beyond. I would have flown away. Yes, that expansive cave drawing felt good.

As I contemplate the freedom I enjoyed as a child, even in my art, I cannot help but overlay it with my parents’ lack of freedom. When I dream of being in the camps, sometimes I see myself flying over the barbed wires and the barracks walls as a white dove against a brilliant



Figure 39. *When I Flew Away*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

blue sky. I wonder how my father and mother imagined their freedom. It is something they have never talked about.

### **Illustrated Stories: October 27**

I am preparing PowerPoints for two of my conference papers because a majority of my work in them uses A/r/tography, a research tool wedding art, research and teaching. It is quite like illustrating a story. I use my photography and my art to further interpret my theories, classroom discoveries and praxes. I feature my photography in a paper that juxtaposes the Asian concept of *wabi-sabi* and Holocaust art. I enjoy layering text on top of image.

*A Memory:* I birthed picture-books in third grade. A child who transgresses the page (that is, who goes beyond the boundaries and dares to draw on her wall) is destined to bear; her young body bares the markings to her interior sites of imagination; she strips herself naked to the forms. Her in/sight couples with her desire; she sires her own words and they, full-born, jump Athena-like from some location within her to embody the site of creativity. Later, some of her classmates call the stories and drawings “lies”. But ahh! the lies she creates! Lies that open up eyes to sights and insights, lies that engrave themselves through her hand and imagination into some kind of fluttering truth. Cixous insisted that

our lives are buildings made up of lies. We have to lie to live. But to write we must try to unlie. Something renders going in the direction of truth and dying simultaneously . . . . Writing or saying the truth is equivalent to death, since we cannot tell the truth . . . . books are exactly those steps that should lead us to the

point where oppositions meet, and, coinciding, suddenly open up to what Kafka would call 'Holy of Holies'. (1993, p. 39)

Kafka, per Cixous, explained that to enter the Holy of Holies, one must insist on becoming completely naked, even of everything under the nakedness—to the core—where there is a sacrifice of sorts in order for the writer to be absorbed by the (hidden) holiness so that “neither can resist the other” (Cixous, 1993, pp. 36-37).

For Cixous, life and death, though appearing to be binaries, are not so, but are simultaneous sites of writing that can be traversed over and over again since the categories are indistinct to the point of being blurred. So what does the writer-I aim for? I am an iconoclast when it comes to binary idols unless there is balance of one in the other as in the yin-yang of life *and* death where terms are no longer oppositional. Perhaps this is because I know both intimately through my *via dolorosa* as I live my parents' lives vicariously. I try to write my *own* truth as it is contingent upon my lived experiences and perspectives, with my own personal “final vocabulary” ala Richard Rorty (1989): “All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives” (p. 73). My truth struggles with my “lies,” but I do not allow it to operate as the know-all, end-all; my life and writing are carried out on shifting landscapes within near-sight of a frail shaking truth that hovers above my expansive, myopic horizon like a bird separated from her migrating flock. And the lie the lost truth tells herself must be a creative, convincing one.

### **Preparing for Savannah: October 28**

I have written out lesson plans for all my visual arts classes for the next three days. My Holocaust Imagery class will have two days to inquire, through college-level essays, into the art and theology of Samuel Bak—that is, they will have to view the art, critique biblical and holocaust symbols present in the work, and relate them to post-Holocaust theology and philosophy, with particular attention to Derrida's theory of deconstruction. Bak uses a kind of visual and theological deconstruction as he shatters iconic images into fragmented and repetitive forms of the initial ones. Other classes will work on art-in-progress. Several teachers have agreed to sub for me; I know my students will be in good hands.

I will travel with a colleague, Rianne, who is also presenting a paper at the conference. Uri's work load demands that he remain behind, although I would dearly love for him to experience Savannah with me. I imagine that the presentations and other sessions will consume my time anyway. But right this moment, I have time to spare.

***So, back to the child I was:*** The child writes lies about horses that she doesn't own but dreams about riding. She pens English gardens she never skipsthrough and creates flowers she never plants, waters, or smells. She *knows* them only through what others wrote, drew, spoke, and through the fertile darkness of nocturnal journeys and longings or daydreams. These penetrate her. They are her lover-muse. Her stout, wrinkled teacher, Miss Lender, ancient

white-haloed oracle, predicts she will be a writer one day. The child keeps her other visions for herself alone—the frightened child hiding from the monster and the snarling dog, the faces screaming in the fires—and wanders into the prediction of the ancient voice towards some dark tower (a female version of Childe Roland?).

Now, almost thirty-five years later, she/I try to gain some perspective on my craft. I know I owe a debt to all the voices that came to me in dreams and predictions. Cixous (1997) observes that “the voices that touch us most strongly are the voices that come still naked, voices from before the door of Paradise, from the time when we knew neither shame nor fear” (p. 49). They are voices that help us come in all our senses to writing. I had no shame in creating lies in the third grade; my dreams told me they were true, that I had written sighted, visioned child-stories into which I could step, fly, or ride. They were my escape from the daily reality of my household Auschwitz. Miss Lender was my Oracle of Delphi, the voice before the door of Paradise, giving me permission to lie/lay my dreams down to write myself. Now, “nontruth is the truth” (Derrida, 1972, 1981, p. 168). I wait for the still small voice that is distinctively both woman and oracular. When it arrives, I know it is my own.

### **Day-Tripping: October 29**

Rianne and I planned to leave for Savannah first thing in the morning, but my morning sickness changed things (enough already with nausea!). I think we got into the car at noon. We arrived in Savannah after 5, so we made good time

on the road. Our hotel is at the bottom of a hill, by the side of the river. Already, we know we must walk along the river and amble through the city—later, after we’ve unpacked. The rooms are very nice, but we want to explore!

*Late Evening:* I meandered down to registration and then to the opening session—a wonderful drama activity that could be used in multiple ways in any classroom. I was already dreaming up ways to use it in the Holocaust Imagery class, using 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen narratives. The session ended and we all trickled into a reception with enough food to call it dinner. Afterwards, we schmoozed, went out to look at the river at night, but now I am headed for bed—exhausted. My first presentation is scheduled for tomorrow. . .



Figure 40. *Reappearance: Savannah*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

### **Everywhere the Trace: October 31, midnightish**

Rianne and I (camera in hand, ready to make art) walked today after the sessions—along the river, through the city. She was patient with me, allowed my eye and camera lens time to probe the ground, the building, the water. Sometimes she waited; other times, I clicked and caught up.

Savannah brought forth the



dead. Perhaps it is because ghosts seem to be everywhere in the city—rippling by the river, perched in the trees, hovering on the ground. Or it is because of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*? Or because I carry the dead with me everywhere and they are loosed in the spheres of my existence. But I saw ghosts in Savannah—from the camps, my parents' stories, and from my dreams. There they were, in plain sight of my camera's lens. I caught them with a click. Since I can't obliterate them, I manipulate them. Digitally. I try to make them do my bidding. Sometimes it works, since now they are transformed into pixels. But sometimes, even in my manipulations, they show me how to represent them. They darken into something other. They pigment, mark, move, deconstruct, then reorganize themselves as my nightmares, as my phantasms in the night. More ominous than when first seen in the streets of Savannah (those were the "friendly ghosts"), they substantiate themselves on my screen in another form. And I must interpret them. Connect them to the past. Tonight, while the darkness covers me, I let them have their way. Savannah has its own mysteries that opened new passageway to my dreams.



Figure 41. *Sidewalk Cartilage*: Savannah, 2008. Digital photograph

### **Ritualizing Broken Glass: November 4**

Back home and working, full of ideas from Savannah. The students in Holocaust Imagery remarked again how some post-Holocaust theologians and art theorists refuse to attach any kind of hope to the Holocaust. I tried to pry the opening of their inquiry wider to allow for discussion of the Event in conversation with after-Event, but somehow they resisted. They, however, are demonstrating the very after-Event hopefulness that they can't seem to grasp during discussions. Someone suggested the creation of a ritual for Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass—the yearly commemoration during the evening of November 9<sup>th</sup> and extending into November 10<sup>th</sup> in which Nazis raised hell against Jewish homes, social centers, businesses and synagogues. In the morning, broken glass was found in every street in the Jewish Quarters. German safety officials (fire and law) did nothing as the rioters looted, burned and killed. The Night marked a significant turning point for Nazism, whose anti-Jewish policies became bolder and more heinous.

I showed my students images of Sally Heywood's abstract paintings of a domed building she was drawn to while living in Berlin. She described how she was drawn to this particular building, and found out after she had begun her initial studies of the building that it was a ruined synagogue that was in the process of being restored. On one particular winter day, she noticed an unusual red glow emanating from the building—from the evening twilight sky, perhaps—but for her, it was a reminder of Kristallnacht fires. She painted a series of the dome in

various lights (<http://www.artnet.com/artwork/425170460/141098/sally-heywood-dome-study.html>).

My students planned, sketched, and plotted their collaborative art piece. As I listened and observed, I found a way to make their individual visions come together. I discovered original windows on the side of the road, waiting for the trash pick-up, from a home in neighboring town that was replacing the old with energy efficient ones. I could not bear to see the old ones thrown into the dump, so I rescued them, stored them outside my house, in the weather, for some kind of art-of-the-future. For some reason, I am drawn to windows; they represent for me a closing off, a keeping out, as well as an opening to what lies inside, or out. There is a sense in which windows also steer me towards the future and the past. The Kristallnacht piece, constructed of windows, seems to be the right future for the past. I will shlep them to class tomorrow—six of them—rather dirty and partly broken already.

Part of class today was a different kind of imagery play, inspired by the dramatic activity from the recent conference. I handed out several sheets of narrative segments by children of survivors, asked students to work with one or two others to choose one of the stories to act out in a ritual, symbolic way. I asked them to attend closely to the imagery of the memories. A group of boys formed a close-knit trinity of actors and they linked arms in a triangle, and faced out to the others. Another group reenacted the fantasy of one Second Gen-er

who dreamed of strangling a Nazi as punishment for what he did to his parents.

Two more became small girls, boxed in by their parents' fears.

My students' acting was nuanced and moving, tying up the stark truth of my own life as a child of survivors in their performances. They staged my fears, dreams, and my heartbeat. Cixous (1994) spoke of this in terms of the "theatre whose stage is our heart":

Today more than ever we need our own theatre, the theatre whose stage is our heart, ours and that of things, that we feel the lack of. We live outside of ourselves, in a world whose walls have been replaced by television screens, a world that has lost its thickness, its depths, its treasures, and we mistake newspaper columns for our thoughts. We are imprinted daily. We even lack the wall, the real wall on which divine messages are written. We are lacking earth and flesh. We live before the paper curtain, and often even as curtains. But what is important to us, what wounds us, what makes us feel we are characters in an immense adventure, is what comes to pass behind the curtain. And behind the curtain is the *naked* stage. We need this nakedness. We need to see the faces hidden behind the faces, the faces the Theater unveils. (Cixous, 1994, p. 152)

The student performers became the revelation of the hidden faces. They brought 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen'ers' hidden identities into the wide and well-lit hallway where they acted out the lives of others. They gave flesh to the narratives, and perhaps recognized their own histories in the stories.

I followed up the activity with a homework assignment to extend the learning: to interpret artistically or through creative writing one of the powerful images used in the narratives.

### Third Generation: November 6

What does it mean to be carrying the beginning of a third generation of survivors? What will already be written on my daughter's body? I can't stop thinking about this. In the days that move towards Kristallnacht, the thoughts of "did we do the right thing?" cuts me like shards. I wake up to NPR. I hear the horror stories of desecrations and beatings of Jews despite the voices that have spoken out against anti-Semitism. Perhaps my father is right. Perhaps we need



Figure 42. *Broken Glass and Lights I*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

to very afraid of the unknown behind the corner and down the dark alley. Is Uri's and my choice to bring another Jew—a possible "victim"—into this world irresponsible?

Do my students see my struggle? I hope not. They are engrossed in completing their projects; they have until the 9th to put on the finishing touches. The

ritual is that evening. They will also present a dramatic reading, using Kristallnacht eye-witness accounts and poetry. But the art project will be the center of their ritual acts. They will ask the rest of the school to help complete the project by gluing on the final pieces of glass and mirrors to the top. I applaud their vision of a truly collaborative ritualizing act of art making.

### **The Ceremony on the Slope: November 10, near midnight**

**9 pm:** Cold night, fire pit, encirclement of bodies. Other students besides mine present their readings first—the historical setting, the photographs (a huge screen and projector were placed at the bottom of the amphitheatre-like hill). Then my students' turn: inside the circle, reading dramatically, their voices emotional with the memories of the narratives they were recounting.

The words carried through the night. After, my students led the silent trek up the hill to the room in which their art was placed. Six memorial candles had been lit as part of the art, and reflected throughout the space in the broken mirrors inside the piece. The six windows were arranged as a box—it could represent a home, a shop, a synagogue. Shards of broken glass, held together by glue, hung from the shattered panes. Some students painted scenes from the Kristallnacht on their remaining glass. Others glued photographs to the glass,

surrounded by broken mirrors. Two students created a fragmented star of David, hanging by a frame. In the dark of the room, it was mysterious and moving. The rest of the boarding students formed a large circle around the art. My students



Figure 43. *Broken Glass and Lights II*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

were positioned close to it to assist in the ritual gluing-on of the last pieces. The entire ritual was done without speaking. Instead, one voice in the crowd began to sing songs associated with the Holocaust. Other voices joined in. Songs of remembrance. Voices of the future. Voices for a world without hatred and genocide. Voices of hope. This is what my students wanted. Despite the warnings from theologians and art critics that Holocaust art can't become a source of hope.

### **Mirroring Evil Debate: November 11**

Two more weeks in this trimester before fall break. I feel the need for R & R (and that's not rock and roll!) even more keenly this year because of the pregnancy. I tire so early, and sleep as late as I dare. But two more weeks to go. Uri, my angel-light, is so patient with me.

I have decided to ask my students to engage with art selected for the 2002 Mirroring Evil show at the Jewish Museum in NYC ([http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring\\_evil/mirroring.html](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring_evil/mirroring.html)). There are sufficient on-line materials for them to research on their own after I present the art and my choice of articles for class work. We began today with the images. I wanted to hear their reactions before introducing them to the great debate in which they would take sides. I also wanted them to see the slipperiness of interpreting the art through first view alone. For instance, Alan Schechner, a child of survivors, was represented through his digitally manipulated photograph. He placed an image of himself holding a Diet Coke can within a famous photograph

of Jews in a Nazi barrack at the time of liberation ([www.dottycommies.com](http://www.dottycommies.com)). I projected the photograph of the Smart Board and asked the students to interpret it. First View. The observations went something like this:

- They had Coke cans?
- Not that looked like that. That logo is a recent design.
- They had bottles back then, not cans.
- Wait, the guy holding the can is. . .well. . .his face isn't exactly emaciated like the others.
- He's pretty well-fed looking, now that I look more closely.
- Look at his clothes. He's got on a striped shirt, but it's not like the—it's like ours.

*The name of the photograph is **Self-Portrait at Buchenwald: It's the Real Thing**. So what's your second view:*

- What??
- The wonders of digital photography.
- Okay, so what's it mean? Why'd he do this?
- What's the "real thing?" Is he joking?
- Maybe making a point—
- About what? About the Diet Coke? That's kinda cruel, isn't it? Putting "diet" in the picture with all that hunger?
- I don't know. . .it doesn't really make sense, does it?
- I think it's a slap in the face to the "real" victims here.

*Schechner was the son of survivors, so in some therapists' opinions, he too was a victim. Third view?*

- Wow, that puts a different spin on the photograph, doesn't it?
- Yeah, but what does it mean? That he's the real thing?
- Well, yeah—I mean, he's got all those stories from his parents, right? It's like he was there, isn't that right?

*Any more responses?*

- Yeah, yes, definitely. The narratives that we read, that we acted out, they—the second generation—
- They all said they inherited their parents' stories.
- But why the Diet Coke? What's up with that?
- Maybe to ground him in the present as he lives in his past? Two places at the same time?



I explained to them that Schechner wants us to look at all images of the Holocaust—especially those that are being used by others for political and/or historical purposes that try to justify the atrocities under the rationale of “human nature.” We looked at his website to gain more insight ([http://www. Dottycommies .com](http://www.Dottycommies.com)), then talked about what some people call a “Holocaust Industry” that seems to trivialize the Holocaust through a blatant commercialism of Holocaust “products.”

*So what’s your fourth view?*

- He’s not the villain some of us thought he was.

*Aha! So your perception has changed.*

- Is he saying that not everything that passes as Holocaust imagery is real?
- Or that people are selling Holocaust for profit?
- Well, yeah—even Hollywood.
- Hollywood is the worst.
- Blockbuster Holocaust! *Schindler’s List*, for example.
- But he’s a Jew—Spielberg.
- And he made an enormous amount of money on the movie.
- He gives a lot of money to Jewish causes, too.
- That doesn’t excuse the fact that he made a lot of money from Holocaust subject matter, though.
- Well, what about the Holocaust Museum selling pins that say, “Remember” or “Never Again”? We all buy them. Aren’t we part of the industry, then?

I refocused them on Schechner’s photograph within the show “Mirroring Evil,” where “evil” takes on multiple meanings. And so they understood that there is room in the discussion for many more views. We visited looked at other art from the Jewish Museum site ([http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring\\_evil/mirroring.html](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring_evil/mirroring.html))

More discussion. More views leading to more questions. Which was right where they should be, I told them. Understanding begins with inquiry. And understanding doesn't necessarily mean knowing all there is to know, or even part of it. Rather, understanding is seeing that there are multiple and competing knowledges, various paths to them, and to step in any direction is to question.

Their homework assignment: Research the show *Mirroring Evil* in detail: artists represented, articles written as part of the Jewish Museum's educational goals for the show; reviews, letters, and protests. I divided them into pro and con groups and gave them the rules for the debate: 1) Each group will work together to find and research articles relating to the show; 2) Each group will want to know both the pros and cons of the Jewish Museum's decision to present the show in order to prepare its own arguments; 3) Visit the websites I have indicated in order to begin your search and print out or save articles/newspaper stories to your computers; 4) Check academic articles on the show from the Academy library or J-Stor; 5) Read some of the articles included in the *Mirroring Evil* book that accompanied the show; 6) Definitely listen to the audio shows as they give some interesting views; 7) Take notes to begin your group's argument and plan spend time outside of class reading and organizing; and 8) Be ready to debate your arguments at the next class. Every person on each team must present an argument.

The Debate Procedure is to be as follows:

**Team Alef:** Team captain begins the debate by presenting a 2-minute statement of team's overall argument.

**Team Bet:** Team captain adds to the debate by presenting a 2-minute statement of her team's opposing view.

**Team Alef:** Person 2 presents a 90-second argument, after which anyone on Team Bet can offer a 30-second rebuttal. Person 2 may follow the rebuttal up with a 30-second defense.

**Team Bet:** Repeat above.

The debate continues with each person adding a different aspect of the team's argument. **NOTE:** Each team must be specific the research topic and preparation each member is assigned for each argument. Each team must be familiar with the arguments of the other team, based on the articles, essays and radio shows.

I look forward to their debate and their level of investment in the research and the inquiry of "mirroring evil." In two days. Now, I look forward to bed. In Uri's arms.

### **Art, Body, Doing and Dialogic Space: November 12**

Stephanie Springgay (2003) wrote that "inquiry as enactment is provocative, it invites the reader/viewer into the interplay of meaning making, and it creates openings through which excess, un/raveling, and absence seeps through" (Springgay, n.p.). As an art teacher and working artist, the enactment of my own questioning towards making sense of my world is a necessity. There is no ideation without sensation on my journey. I have to bring forth, push, strain, birth. This is not limited to the act of art making, but also expands to the act of teaching my students as I invite them to become participants in their own learning and art making. The "Mirroring Evil" debate is one example that not only allows them the bodily activity of debating (facial expressions, gestures, posture), but provides them the vehicle in which to masquerade. That is, they will mask their personal opinions on the show and the art in order to create the openings of

which Springgay speaks. Openings allow for excesses, double entendres, slippages and extraneous bits of societal, cultural, philosophical strata to be viewed and examined.

Another example of enactment within a dialogic space took place in a team-taught Eco-Judaism class. For the final project, students made protest art that highlighted some aspect of the environmental, ecological issues about which they had been learning that semester. Their art was portable; that is, we took it on the road to a park in the heart of the city on a Sunday afternoon. There, they set up their show and engaged park visitors in dialogue. Within the dialogic space of the city park, they heard other voices and views, and met people with whom they most likely would never had engaged without the masqueraded enactment of their protest art show.

An education that never encounters face to face dialogue with others who are outside the circle of daily classroom interactions—is disembodied and cloistered. In the park, students were able to stretch and expand their own questions by facing and dialoging with the inquiries and knowledges of others.

Springgay (2003):

Education that is relational moves away from a distant, clinical gaze to a mode of being that is touched and touches in close proximity. Understanding education as relational recognizes the gap between being touched and touching as a space that is less about identity of sameness or difference but made across bodies, gender, race, and sexualities as sameness *and* difference simultaneously. The desire for and the impossibility of removing this gap remains in the fold, where teachers and students must reflect on knowing and being as porous moments that breathe and are marked through time. If we conceive of the body as intercorporeal and in the process of becoming we must open up spaces in our educational practices that include tactile and felt knowledge. Intercorporeality is letting the inside out and leaving glistening marks of interior hopes upon the

surface. Skin after all stretches and retracts, always showing traces of its own processes. Such *becoming of skin* reveals metamorphic moments in teaching and learning where students and teachers interrogate aesthetic engagements with, in, and through bodies. Intercorporeality constitutes an active commitment to learning and knowing that destabilizes and ruptures boundaries, folding desire and synaesthesia into education. (Springgay, n.p.)

As you can see, I am focused on bodily learning right now, my own expanding, stretching one included. I fold and unfold with each change.

### **The Great Debate: November 13**

Not as monumental as the presidential debates, but in my estimation the *Mirroring Evil* Debate was just as exciting and fast-paced. There were the out-of-turn impassioned outbursts (can they ever be avoided?) in gut response to one debater or another's statements. There were the rolling eyes, the gasps, the looks of horror as one team brought out a point the other team deemed inappropriate or unworthy of mention. But I saw the transformation, despite their personal opinions of the show at the Jewish Museum, from first knowledge two days ago to arguments that quoted sources and gave specific examples of art work from the show. Embodied enactment for the sake of relational inquiry.

### **Self-Examination: November 14**

My doctor tells me my visits will become more frequent as I cross over into the second trimester. She examines the internal and tells me everything is working inside—the baby is growing on schedule. I am aware of internal changes on the external shape of things to come. I can feel them with my hands, like rounded balls of pliant clay. My breasts are becoming the fountains of life. My belly pushes outward, a new continent rising.

I engage in this kind of self-examination with my art and writing as well. I am fond of a technique for examining of myself as writer as proposed by Donald M. Murray (1970), who strove to see the interior view of the writer, “to find out what writing looks like when it is not seen from the outside as an act completed, but when it is seen from the inside as a continuing process” (p. 21). I understand “process” not as a rigid standard, but as a way to make art or writing in the spiral, in the labyrinth. I like Murray’s idea of the writer’s interior. For me, it is the center point of the creative labyrinthine journey. It webs to my womb-site of marking, to that re-entry into a site of previous inhabitation, of going backward into Eliot’s forest to find the “hidden laughter” of my children while simultaneously moving forward. It bids me examine my personal statement in multiple ways.

I choose the declaration **“I am the body of a particular woman who births with words, images and ideas; who creates rites for herself in order to remember and create the experience of marking her life,”** as a credo of sorts. This credo is not inviolate; I will not stake my creative life on it. But it allows me a site of observation. A place to consider what I seem to experience, feel, and observe about my own creativity.

I begin with a personal conversation with myself that grows beyond. My “credo” will be that with which I am in dialogue throughout the spiraling year of teaching and birthing to life. Future, past, and present. It is all, and it is nothing. It is what I make of it, how I embody it, how I make it live. It changes; it has changed, like my own body which for years was unable to conceive.

I examined this phenomenon artistically in a quilted art for a show in the fall that I called *IN/Fertility*. In my art, I imagined all manner of women's bodies,

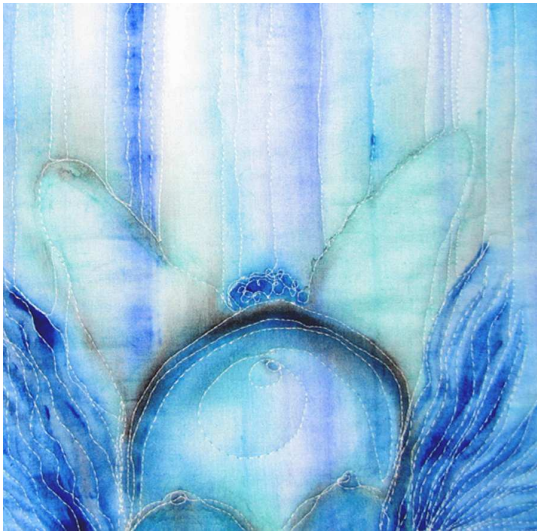


Figure 44. *New Landscape*, 2005  
Watercolor on imported pima cotton;  
machine pieced and quilted

internal and external, as they experienced the heartbreak of infertility and the joy of conception. *New Landscape* is the one with which I am identifying today. When I lie on the bed, my breasts and growing belly are new territories to explore and with which to converse. I speak to them in whispers. I sing to them softly—lullabies for my body and my child.

There are no limitations here, only new landscape of possibilities.

### **Conversing with Ghosts: November 17**

My Holocaust Imagery students and I discussed Ziva Amishai-Maisel's (2005) "Haunting the Empty Place" in which she traced the history of interpretation of "ghosts" from Holocaust to post-Holocaust art. She observed that "artists first used Holocaust 'ghosts' to express a sense of loss: the victim's disappearance left behind only a spectral image, relics, smoke, or holes in the collective memory" (p. 123). But contemporary post-Holocaust artists visualize ghosts as the ongoing chain of memory that continues to both haunt and comfort

those who follow after them: relatives, acquaintances, artists who are inheritors of the memories of their lives, or who vicariously claim memory for the sake of the nameless specters who have no one left in their familial chain to remember them. Natan Nuchi's c. 1985-1995 works (see <http://www.nuchi.com/01.html>) give us the vision of pale, floating, dream-like ghosts against a solid black field. They are not the screaming, open-mouthed ghosts that haunted survivor Zoran Music's 1970s drawings (see [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/about/press\\_release\\_archive/music.html](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/about/press_release_archive/music.html)). I asked students to interpret their own notion of ghosts as they come to it through vicarious memory of the



Figure 45. *Veiled*, 2008. Digital photograph

Shoah, as influenced by artists' renderings and witnesses' stories. As they worked, their visions took shape into remarkable art. Some used images from their childhood (emailed to them hurriedly by parents and relatives); one photographed faces through a small window shrouded in gauzy fabric. In many, the folds and layers of memories and meanings intersected and intertwined. Photographs and texts touched or overlapped



another; the images were not always clearly seen— yet another veil through which the subject of each art piece is difficult to discern.

Did my students photograph or paint to obliterate? To hide? Or to make the viewer seek further interpretation? Some students used the symbolic six objects—a clear connection to the six million. But I counted seven in one piece, disrupting an assumed or easy interpretation of it. Why seven? Is it a connection with the occurrences of “seven” in the Torah in some mystical way? Or one addition to situate the piece within the continuing genocides of the twenty-first century? If so, the piece has created a bridge from the chasm of the Holocaust to the chaos of contemporary societies who have not heeded the Shoah’s lessons

#### **Not My Own: November 18**

I am amazed with my students’ recent artwork—they have used a twinned interrogation into the Holocaust and their own memory work to create their pieces. Each one wrote an artist’s statement to intersect her or his work with theologians and artists studied in class. I was delighted to see that what I have been trying to teach in my classes orally with the help of images has become part of my students’ thoughts and artistic marking.

I use memory of my personal experience and the trace of my parents’ stories, and the collective memories of the Jewish people in my own marking/art making, and do not consider this visual approach less than my (in)ability to discourse orally. I tell visual stories from narratives that are not only my own but that I have made my own through a trace or through repetitive hearing. If some

form of truth is to be found, each person who hears or reads my poetry or sees my art, through unique vision, takes it to a different level—higher, as Plato wishes us to go (in *Phaedrus*, beginning at 247A) or lower, with Cixous (1993) into roots, or even a hell imagined as an underground of earth and roots of the past (p. 151)—may I suggest Auschwitz and all the other Nazi camps here? Each perspective has its own precious views, its own memories.

**Fall Break: November 21**

I have told Uri that my goal for this fall break is to spend more time with him, something that is difficult for me to do during the school year with lesson plans and grading and special trips. But I cannot let this year be like all others. This is the year for celebration of and blessing the coupling of our bodies and the birthing of our most important act of creating.

We will go to the mountains for a few days to rest, to enjoy each other without the distractions of home and office. Both of us are realistic—we know that there will be the stray thought of work that will creep uninvited into the hotel room with us. In fact, I will try to visit the Holocaust and Peace Center at the university while we are there just to see what they offer during their summer symposium. But that will be just a short side trip, I promise. My parents even gave us a check and told us to go somewhere nice to eat. Jubilation! We are getting out of town, and that is a big accomplishment.

CHAPTER III  
SECOND TRIMESTER



**Growing Womb / Hibernation:  
Late November – February**

Figure 46. *Early Morning Snow*, 2009. Digital photograph

**Afterglow: November 25**

I didn't photograph much at all in the mountains. But I was captivated by two ducks on a semi-frozen pond outside our hotel. These two swam close. In the photograph above, the female is quiet, floats effortlessly, unmoving, within a ring of water that seems to contain her, or shield her. From what? The other ducks nearby? The ever-watchful eye of her mate, who is never far from her? He is marked by his own activity. The water ripples and moves as he swims toward

her, around her, beside her. But she is silent. Brooding. I want to compare the pair to Uri and me. But I can do so only in relation to the Shoah. I am the silent,

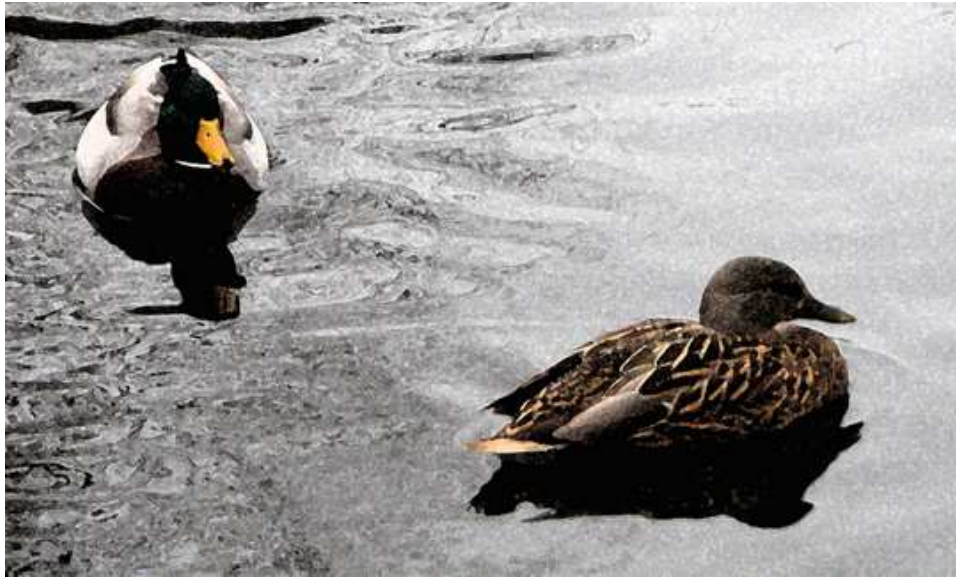


Figure 47. *Two Swimmers*, 2008. Digital photograph

brooding mate who floats in waters not my own, contained by the circle of rippling memories of darkness and suffering—also not my own—which have the power to drown me. Uri, ever-watchful angel, approaches, circles, surrounds me with his presence, but is unable to break the power of the circle. He can't penetrate hell.

I remember reading Carl Friedman's story. Another child of survivors, he remembered the power of the camp that kept his father caged, like a wolf:

He never mentions it by name. It might have been Trebibor or Majdawitz, Soblinka or Birkenhausen. He talks about "the camp," as if there had been just one . . . . Most of the time he drops the past participle for convenience. Then he says, "I have camp," as if the situation hadn't changed. And it's true, it hasn't. He still has camp, especially in his face. Not so much in his nose or his ears,

although they're big enough, but in his eyes . . . I saw a wolf in the zoo once, with eyes like that. He was pacing back and forth in his cage, up and down and up and down, to the front and back again. I spent a long time staring at him through the bars. (Friedman, 2002, pp. 33-34)



Figure 48. *The Gaze*, 2008. Digital photograph

Did the young Carl  
only see the imprisoned  
eyes? Or did he feel the cage  
too? I touch it. Sometimes in  
my dreams I reach out and  
dare to grab hold of it, and  
tempt fate in the act because  
I know that it has the power  
to kill. Why has this aspect of  
my parents' lives before the  
end of Hitler— this  
encirclement of hell—why  
has it wrapped itself around  
me to haunt my freedom?

### **Never-Ending: November 26**

I read backwards through my blogs to November 14, to my entry of self-examination, to continue to sew the thread of beginning. I thought to stitch a box, but realize now that the never-ending circle with its curves and its ovum/womb shape is the shape of my life and my art. It represents also the swell of my

physical body—my belly and my breasts—as they become rounder and more present. I sew my self into the circle with words and images. I knot and needle ideas; I watch them move like a spool of thread on the bobbin, with no direction but around. Here is where my phenomenological self-examination will take place, at times singular and separate, but able to join with other lives and theories (sperm + ovum = something new).

The fall break allows me time to think, to imagine, to observe not only my physical body, but my body of art and writing. Here is what I perceive:

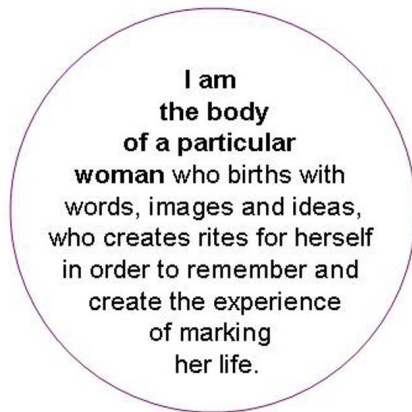


Figure 49. *I am the Body: Part I*

**I am the body:** This is the beginning in

so far as there can be a beginning: an acknowledgement that the creative-I is situated in the physical and constructed body (with all its oozings, flakings, expansions, expulsions, joys and pains) **of a particular woman**, she who is called by my name, who contains within her body the experiences and

memories (including traces of the near and ancient past) of the woman who was named Aliza Berkowitz by her survivor parents and became Aliza Shalem under the *chuppah*. Woman. Wife. Daughter of survivors. Granddaughter to ones no longer breathing in this living space. Mother-to-be. Teacher. Artist. And so on. This particular woman is the creative-I who creates as the woman I am named and who I am in my physical site of living. I claim to be no one else. I listen to

others; I read others. I surround myself with the sounds and images of others. But when I create, I do not do so pseudonymously, but as myself, for myself. I create for my own pleasure and because I am compelled to do so. It is my womb-experience. I am enwombed, present in the womb space of my art and writing with none other than my own multiple selves assisting in the act. I create to put my mark on the page.

But I cannot claim for myself what life will cause my creating to become when they are joined to others' creative expressions, particularly the narratives of my parents' experiences in the camps. Cixous (1991):

Who makes me write, moan, sing, dare? Who gives me the body that is never afraid of fear? Who writes me? Who makes my life into the carnal field of an uprising of texts? Life in person. For a long time now, the names that are only right for the urge to possess have not been right for naming the being who equals life. All the names of life suit it, all the names put together don't suffice to designate it. When I have finished writing, when we have returned to the air of the song that we are, the body of texts that we will have made for ourselves will be one of its names among so many others. (p. 44)

Cixous draws me back from lofty images of my art and my writing being remembered in the future. It may be so, but Creative-I is only one of my names. If I examine my "authentic self", I am obliged to "recognize the need to be constantly vigilant in [my] society, to be engaged in political action aimed at preserving and reinforcing a way of life that allows for such worthy personal life causes as that of authenticity" (Guignon, 2004, p. 162). In other words, I cannot hide within my circle of self-naming and creativity. Through authentic acts, I must see beyond my credo and my circle to the world that cries outside.

My circle needs to become diaphanous. Its thickness must be made thin and almost transparent so that my observations and creative actions are not isolated from the

heartbeat of that world

in which I float. My

vision should be both

near and farsighted.

And peripheral.

Otherwise, how can I

see sites in need of

transformative action?

Elizabeth Kamarck

Minnich (1990)

advocated knowledge

that transforms old

systems and

suppositions into world-changing actions:



Figure 50. *Body as a Torah Scroll*, 2008  
Collage as photograph; digitally manipulated and marked

Change comes when thinking is released from old tangles of errors that have locked it into the past and when we learn to analyze the potential for real change in our very specific contexts. In that movement from the conceptual to the concrete, and from the concrete to the conceptual, is one of the most important conversations of all, the one that returns thinking to the world it helps illuminate, and, in turn, challenges that thinking to take account of particulars, individuals, specific situations. (p. 190)



My particulars, individuals, and situations are my students, my family and friends, and my community. But I cannot ignore the closeness of other unknowns in this world web of instantaneous news and internet notes. People who are suffering in ways similar to my parents in the camps, who are abused and beaten, threatened daily with their very lives, these also are my family, along with homeless individuals and families on the downtown streets and in places far from my own. What do I do for them? How can I encourage my students to see them as familiar/familial faces? As brothers and sisters in need? How can my/their art mark change?

#### **Hodu La'Adoshem: November 27**

My parents decided to visit some distant relatives ("God help them, they're not doing so well," my mother told me) so Uri and I dined tonight with friends for Thanksgiving.

We arrive: the table is wide and welcoming—there are others there whom I meet for the first time. We eat, schmooze, and are thankful for each other, the moment, and the two men who brought us all together. My prayer is one of thanks to the Breath (*Yah*), the Name (*HaShem*), the Place (*HaMakom*): *Shehechayanu v'keey'manu v'higianu lazman hazeh*. Who has kept us alive, sustained us and brought us to this particular time (and table!). Ameyn.

We were nourished by having dined and discussed our lives and our world in a sharing of food and selves. And yet, even in the joy of remembering the moment, the art of one student entered my consciousness. In her watercolor, a

lone woman sits on a sofa to the left of an elongated coffee table inscribed with a narrative. A large empty arm chair has been pulled up to the head of the coffee table, facing the viewer. On it, a yellow star with the word *zakhor*, remember, has been placed. The woman looks melancholy. Her head is down, her hands seem lifeless resting on the tabletop. A white cloth covers the table, but there is no food, only text:

My grandmother was born in a small Polish town. But Hitler's troops arrived and brought hell with them. They murdered my grandmother's brothers and sisters. She escaped by hiding in the woods and by the goodness of people who gave her food and shelter. After the war, she moved to Canada. She still remembers.

It is a Third Generation account. Is the figure sitting at the coffee table the grandmother or the artist? The woman is fluid enough to serve as both. The narrative too is simultaneously the grandmother's and the artist's. And the coffee table? Is it only a table? Perhaps it is the coffin of those who disappeared or were murdered. Or is it a memory box which must be approached in silence and solitariness? Is it the lack that my student and her grandmother feel at the loss of their family, depicted as a table inscribed with remembrances but not members? Is it a silent suffering?

The inscription on the table is likewise inscribed on the body of my student and her family. I see it in the melancholia of the figure at the table. bell hooks (1994) wrote about the "passion of experience" which

encompasses many feelings but particularly suffering, for there is a particular knowledge that comes from suffering. It is a way of knowing that is often

expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience. This complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance. It is a privileged location . . . . In the classroom, I share as much as possible the need for critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively. (p. 91)

I remember that in my student's painting, the woman has a line on her arm—a number tattoo? Grandmother, then. But no, even granddaughter can be inscribed with grandmother's suffering. It is passed *dor l'dor*, from “generation to generation.” It is the story of our collective lives that we reenact daily.

### **Early Morning: November 28**

I am meandering into my fourteenth week today. My baby is about three inches long, according to the experts, and is able to respond physically to stimuli—smile, curl toes and fingers. And those tiny fingers even have their own fingerprints—imagine that!

Along with all the positive things—including no more nausea!—there are the other traces of the past that Uri and I must contend with—the genetic code of Ashkenazi Jews (with links to Eastern Europe) that can manifest itself in Tay-Sachs disease, where the baby seems to be developing normally after birth, but then neurological symptoms appear—the baby becomes blind, deaf, and can't swallow. The newly flexed muscles stop doing their job. The baby has seizures. . .needs a tube for feeding. At best, life expectancy is under five years. Hardly ever more than four.

My doctor says amniocentesis is a necessity because of age and genetics. I have scheduled an appointment for next week, and try not to dwell on the possibilities. Despite my fears, I cannot help but think *kol tuv* (all is good). But it is not only my mind that speaks. My body echoes affirmation. *Kol tuv*.

### Phenomenological Continuation: November 29

**I birth:** that is, I mark my words, images and ideas, that is, spoken, visual and mental language, on a surface, that is, on

something that shows the mark. Not into an

audio device. I have never been only an auditory

body. Nor a visual one. I need kinesis, I need to

move. I need tactile writing—my hands, my

eyes, my fingertips, my arms, my back, my legs,

my mouth. It might be the bedroom “cave,” or a

canvas, or lines of a notebook, or the screen of

this computer. Whatever the surface, the markings show as signs comprised of

letters, as strokes or line, as sentences formed from words,

as formations of representation or abstractions, and on and on. That which I birth

becomes visible to my seeing eyes and audible to the language of my ears.

Donald Murray (1970) suggested that:

when you sit at the writer’s desk, in the writer’s skin, you discover his feeling for the language as a living tool. He feels language in his fingers, hears language in his ears, sees language evolving and working on his page. He knows language, no matter how much he delights in this tool, is never an end in itself. (p. 22)

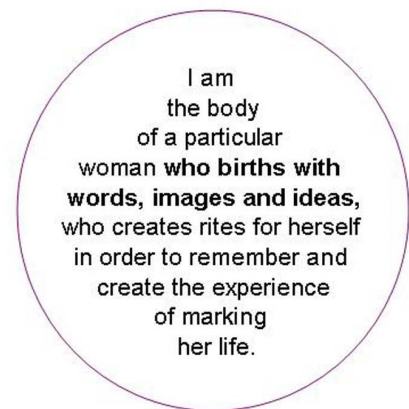


Figure 51. *I am the Body: Part II*

Whether with writing or with images, I engage in tactile and sensory activity. But the act of birthing is not all there is. As an educator, I am responsible for the intermingling and shifting of student and teacher words, images, theories, viewpoints. This is “relationality through parallax”:

Parallax is the apparent shift of an object against a background due to a change in observer position or perspective shift . . . . Depending on the angle of view, the object thus appears situated in front of different backgrounds of even embedded within different contexts. (Sameshima, 2008, p. 51)

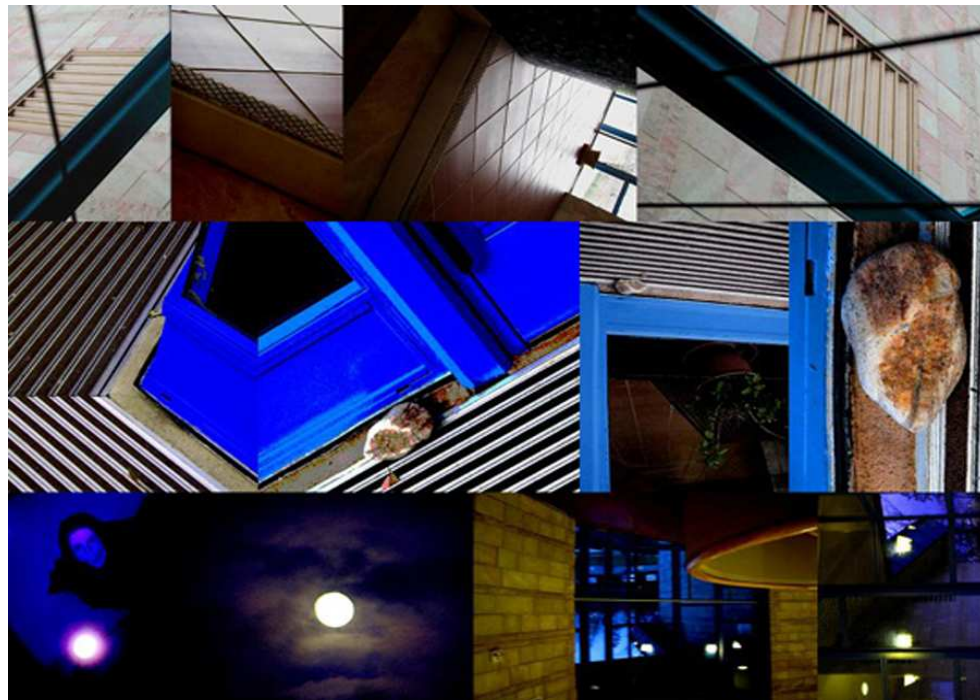


Figure 52. *Parallax*, 2008. Montage; digital photographs

In the montage, *Parallax*, I joined various views of my classroom building

and its surrounding grounds. My eye always looks for an angle, a shadow, an isolation of an object from its surroundings so as to be examined in a different light. I like the twists and turns disruption brings to my vision. Textures and geometries placed contiguously in the montage allow for greater depth of vision, a vision behind and under first sight. It allows the disruption of the normal and common to disrupt my perceptions. This is how I view my life: inherited memories sidle up next to my own and merge in a collection of experiences I call my own. The sightlines are unnerving at times, like an Escher drawing. My eyes travel on lines that don't quite match up; my expectations result in inconsistencies and inadequacies. But the site of experience cannot help but be interesting and challenging. I constantly refocus to know where I am.

In my studio, I step away from close physical contact with a piece, or as I write, I absent myself from the proximity of the words for a day, a week, or more, in order to gain another perspective (or multiples) on the piece.

In my classroom, I realize that I approach material with which the class engages and dialogues through the perspective of my past and present life as it is wrapped up in the Holocaust and in the continuation of the Jewish people through the birth of my child. My students, too, bring their own narratives to class—as a third generation inheritor of memories, as a child of Christian and Jewish parents, as a victim of abuse or rape, as an overprotected, sheltered only child, whatever the story may be. But these are not my students' only identities. They, like me, are many nuanced identities within the body that is given a name

at the *brit milah* (circumcision ritual) or the *simchat bat* (naming ceremony for a girl). When they look through the perspective of one of their identities, they view things through those eyes. Then comes parallax! Their vision shifts and they see anew.

***Continuing on to Words/Images:*** The seeds of written and visual

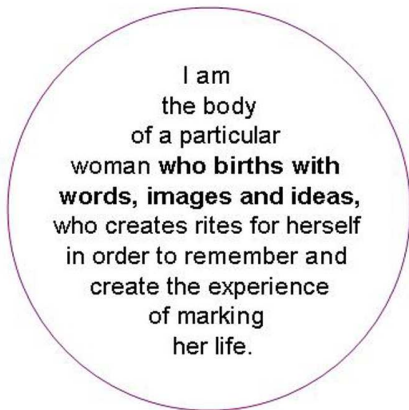


Figure 53. *I am the Body: Part II*

language contain a whole garden if only they are fertilized and nurtured. I allow my images and words to connect in physical form; I must make some sense of them for myself as I birth. This is the **idea**. The markings that I bring forth are ones that have been used, reused, and overused by those who marked before me. I alone find their meaning for myself as I uncover and/or over-cover them. I move them

forward into another form: into a re-birth, a re-formation, a re-vision through my woman's body. Language and imagery plunges back with me into the womb, in creative, moving waters of chaotic re-incarnation. I love it when my creative ideas swim, float, tread water, converge. The sense of them is not necessarily cognitive, but intuitive, feeling, having to do with touching, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, experiencing. I want to taste them on my tongue. I want to caress them with my fingertips. I want to hear them sing, and see them dance. I

want them to swim with me to birth. When the idea is created, I find it very good.

*Tov me'od.*

### **Riting the Wrongs: November 30**

My mother once remarked that when the general population doesn't know how to respond to a Holocaust survivor, it builds a memorial and considers that the response. She doesn't put much credence in memorials, although she won't dismiss them altogether. Even she understands that public spaces are needed for confrontation and contemplation on the acts of Hitler and his ilk upon her and others. But she says she'd like someone to talk to *her*, to listen to *her* story. By "someone," she doesn't mean the Jews—she has spoken many times to synagogues, Hebrew school and Hadassah groups—those who already have some idea of her ordeal. What she craves, she says, is the face to face questions of the "goyim"—the non-Jews. They, she assumes, are the ones erecting the memorials to ease their own guilt. It doesn't matter that I correct her or urge her to see another view; it is set in her mind, probably from the first memorial she saw years after liberation. I consider also that she should come face to face with a questioning non-Jew, she would probably retreat in silence.

The notion of rites, whether as memorial or in the activity of daily life, are important for Jews. Sculptor George Segal created a Holocaust memorial ([www.jewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/object\\_...](http://www.jewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/object_...)) that memorialized other figures in Jewish lore (Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac are buried in the heap), as it did the victims of Hitler's Final Solution. Segal described elements of



his work in a radio interview with Canadian Broadcasting Company's Stephen

Lewis:

The sculpture consists of eleven life-size white-plaster figures. Ten dead bodies lie on a floor in a disorganized, disheveled heap. There is a single male figure standing behind a barbed-wire fence . . . . I did not want to work on this sculpture. I had refused for about six months, because I knew I would have to saturate myself in death . . . . A survivor . . . told me, "Drop all your intellectual nonsense. . . a monument like this has to make people cry." He was perfectly right. The more I looked at photographs, the more obscene the disorderly dumping and heaping of dead bodies became . . . Any time anybody dies . . . there is an order of grieving and religious observance . . . . There's an orderliness to the repeated ritual of a funeral . . . . [In the sculpture t]here is the necessity of the first shock of revulsion . . . . But after you look at the sculpture for a while, it also becomes necessary to think about human things: tender gestures, or gestures of regard, gestures of humanity. I had to use live people playing dead . . . . Unless we say something about the value of individuals, the devastating force of a single person, unless there's a reflex, a record of horror, we're all in danger of death. (Cited by Lewis, 1984, pp. 111-116)

It is interesting to me that my mother sees Holocaust memorials and rites as belonging to those outside her circle, particularly when she engages in memorial rites herself at every turn: lighting the Shabbat candles, touching the mezuzah upon entering and exiting the house, lighting the memorial lights for those who have passed on "to the *olam haba*"—the world to come. She also has her particular rites that I am sure came from her experience in the camps: never peel away a potato skin; eat soup as soon as it is served to you and do not wait for others to be served because the heat of the soup disappears all too soon; always make certain that clothes for the next day are on your bed when you go to sleep—better still, under the covers with you—so you know exactly where to find them. These are the rites I grew up with, and that I have worked hard to overcome (except for potato skins—I like the crispiness of them when baked).

By examining my parents' peculiar rites of daily living, I have been able also to query/queer my own, particularly as they influence and affect my art making and writing.

### **Pomp and Circumstance: December 1**

I re-turn (as if turning again to the beginning; as if turning from my thoughts in my last blog; as if turning back to a previous way of thinking; as if

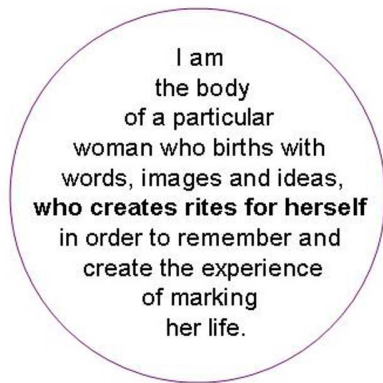


Figure 54. *I am the Body: Part III*

turning like a Sufi spinner or the turning of a Torah scroll) to a heightened understanding) to my statement about myself: **I create rites.** I imagine first, then act out customs or practices through which I prepare to create myself in the act of creating. There is sometimes a certain pomp and circumstance to the acts: pouring the wine (before the pregnancy!), lighting the

candles, arranging the pillows on the sofa or the paints on the table. I experiment with the rites that I find most helpful for myself as artist: these may be associated with remembrance of some sort, of searching the corners of my experiences (or photographs) for those events that may have escaped my active attention, of bringing them to the forefront. Or ways of urging a swim backwards towards impregnation.

**For myself:** These artful rites are my own alone. I do not need the rites of the long list of canonical men who have created their own rites, though I am not

ignorant of them. I may engage them in dialogue, but do not obligate myself to practice them. Likewise, I do not obligate myself to other women's rites of creating—desks piled high with books, articles, journals, sometimes undecipherable scratchings on loose pages, coffee, or wine, within reach. Or a studio with expansive windows and abundant light so as to be within sight of the environmental art of nature or some other inspiration. I seek my singular and solitary candlelight, or the deep darkness of dream-night, from where I awake to mark furtively and furiously on a small bound notebook by my bed to move the dream from fleeting seed to womb. Sometimes I chant and hum; sometimes I pray. I use my rites religiously, though not always sacredly. They allow me to enter the fertile womb, but neither mark for me nor guarantee that what I mark is anything but my own truth.

Yet even as I mark these thoughts on this page, I acknowledge there is a marking that is not a selfish “for myself” because I carry the memory of other selves—my grandparents, aunts and uncles, bunkmates of my parents in the camps—all whose stories have become entwined with my own. My self is expansive and expanding, folding the others within it. I mark also for she who moves within me. Under the weight of memories and future responsibilities, can anything I do be solely *for myself*?

I recall a story told by Emil Fackenheim of a great Hasid, Rabbi Israel Shapiro of Grodysk—one of the victims of transport to Treblinka. Upon arriving at the camp, he assured his following that they were now witnesses to the

birthpangs of the Messiah, that their own ashes would serve as purification rite for Israel. Fackenheim (1994) wrote:

We hear these words across the abyss and weep. Some of us may weep for the *Shekhina*. We all must weep not only for them but also for ourselves, for we cannot mystically either fly above history or leap forward to its eschatological end. The screams of the children and the silence of the Muselmanner are in *our* world. We dare not forget them; we cannot surpass or overcome them; and they are unredeemed . . . . In our search for a post-Holocaust Tikkun [mending of the world] we must accept from the start that at most only a fragmentary Tikkun is possible. We must accept our situatedness. We must live with it. (p. 256)

Whatever rites I engage in, whether writing, art, or lighting Shabbat candles, I always have a larger picture in my consciousness—the screams of the children, the silent stares of the walking dead. My rites become part of the repair, part of the Tikkun, fragmentary as it may be. Marla Morris (2001) likewise saw through a dystopic lens that tended to be suspicious of anything calling itself hopeful or utopic. Her “memory work is tough, not soft. This call to remembrance is a testament of suffering” (p. 24). Morris mentioned the intergenerational trauma—in which I see myself doubled—as Laplanche’s “double inscription”—trauma that becomes stuck and repressed in the original survivor, and thus passed on to her children and even grandchildren (p. 37).

I struggle every day, as the daughter of survivors, to be myself alone, to rid myself of my parents’ memories that have somehow transferred themselves to me. And yet here is the paradox, stated as a series of questions by Rabbi Hillel: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” (*Pirke Avot* 1:14)

Morris (2001) warned of the transference that occurs when we read Holocaust texts, especially ones that deal with violent events that we are not ready psychologically to handle. In this case, the transference becomes one of “preconceived notions or prearranged feelings about violent encounters” (p. 43). While Morris argued that we still need interpreters of Holocaust texts, she wondered if any researcher is really “fully ready to do this kind of work. No matter how much time is spent around the black sun of Auschwitz, constant ruptures in understanding occur, psychic upheavals continue” (p. 43). Morris turned her attention to what she terms the “strangeness” of interpreting historical texts in which she suggested that strangeness

comes out of sites of liminality, slips of the tongue, or what Freud would call parapraxes, proliferations of doubles, repetitions, ghosts, reversals, internal objects, or uncanny transferences . . . . The destruction of information has much to do with the ways in which historians repress difficult materials . . . . what the historian chooses to throw away or exclude . . . . victims, women, gays, and lesbians . . . . because matters of gender and sexuality are taboo . . . . Historical writing shapes memory by erasing subjects. (Morris, 2001, p. 118)

Even I, cognizant as I am of the transference of memories that are ever present in my own life (causing fear of erasure), must diligently point out the erasures of others in Holocaust text or art. The last phrase of Rabbi Hillel’s set of questions—“If not now, when?”—seems to fit this consideration of memory-shaping. It is time to uncover the traces of marginalized groups who have been erased by Holocaust historians, theologians or researchers. As I find them in liminal spaces, covered over by the rhetoric of normativity, I mark their memories.

## Déjà Vu: December 2

As a postmodernist, my phenomenology of writing and art making doesn't allow me to categorize what is superior or inferior or to engage in any other potential binaries. I experience what I create as both as physical and mental/spiritual (using the terms in multivalent fashion) phenomena. I have had *déjà vu* moments; can I ever be certain that what I intuited was *not* experienced in some prior, unremembered event, or previous life experience/existence? When I consider the inheritance of memories from the time of Egypt on to Auschwitz, it seems that the intuited, *déjà vu* experiences *were my own*. The dead ones of these memories are still alive in my creative and contemplative becoming. But to privilege one method, way, or understanding over another is a praxis in which I choose not to engage.

Rites are only signs towards the passageways; they provide a small sense of security and familiarity to what is a slippery, dark, unknown site of activity. They are the body's acts to coax a word to birth. My photograph, *Passage: Savannah*, shows an alley that begins and ends in light, but shadows are cast along the sides, and



Figure 55. *Passage: Savannah*, 2008  
Digital photograph

further down the alley is a dark obstacle; the camera's lens renders it indeterminate. Can I move around it? I have no way of knowing unless I go back to the alley and walk it myself.

In the Passover Seder we are asked to imagine the Exodus story as if we ourselves were both slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt *and* led out to freedom by Moses. We become active participants in the journey of our history. We walk it ourselves. How can we fully understand the Holocaust if we do not partake in the memory of sufferings of those we've lost and the survivors who still walk beside us, whispering their stories in our ears and dreams?

### **Double Vision: December 3**

I have been playing artistically and theoretically with the image of my own self as a double after I allowed Delbo (1995) to dialogue with Morris (2001). I began with a photograph I took in which I was doubled in the reflection framed on the surface of my car at twilight. I manipulated the image to highlight the dramatic sky and to diffuse the distinction between



Figure 56. *Two Skies*, 2008. Digital photograph

windshield and hood of the car. Although a line remains, it now does not give clear evidence of the reflective ground, nor of the subject of the doubling; it is rendered as a dream sequence.

What does it mean to double myself? To see myself as two separates or a conjoined second? I imagine myself as both self and second self that is my parents' consciousness. But my first self is already the second because I am the child of my parents, Holocaust survivors. I am two in one. What is this second, separate image, then? An Imaginary? A ghost? Perhaps the specter of my grandmother, for whom I am named, gassed in the camps, insubstantial in reality, but appearing as real. Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo (1995) wrote that she was

not alive. People believe memories grow vague, are erased by time, since nothing endures against the passage of time. That's the difference; time does not pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it. I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it. (Delbo, 1995, p. 267)

For Delbo, the *doublement* was part of who she became during and after Auschwitz. It is also how I feel as a child of survivors. I am both myself and another. Perhaps even multiple others. How do I dare explicate their presence in me? How do I unfold those whose lives and memories are enfolded in mine? How will I (or they) be further doubled in my child?

**December 4**

*Kov tuv*—everything is good! My daughter is healthy with no signs of abnormalities or genetic diseases. I wrap her in my dreams.



## How I Dream Myself: December 5

This is how I dream myself at times: I am my grandmother, my mother's

mother, Aliza Mandelbaum. I am boxed in with my children—toddlers to teens—on a cold journey to somewhere. I have been ill for several months. The cold in the box and the closeness of others who are ill force me into delirium. I sweat, I cry out, I see visions of another box, fire-red. When we arrive—somewhere—there are men with sticks, guns and dogs. I think I am in hell. Perhaps Dante wrote true. There is a long snake of others heading for some



Figure 57. *Red Chamber with Lights*, 2008  
Digital photograph

other somewhere. I am pushed into it. With my children. Then, a split into two. I become my mother, separate from my grandmother, yet still remain my grandmother, reaching out to grasp my mother's/my disappearing hands reaching out to grasp as well. Two. Two lines. Two people. Two destinies. One that ends in the box. I don't see the end. I see only the red of the box and reflected lights in mirrors that double the walls. Then the other. The other self. The one who lives and dies simultaneously. Who passes on her memories in

conception as perception. Doubling self. Swirling my visions backward and forward, upward and downward, until vertigo is a way of life and I learn to live in the spiral. Second generation survivor. I live and die at night with memories that are hers who lives and within whom I lived for nine months. I live within the dream I dream about the perished one—Aliza—who-is-she—who-is-me. *Who am I?*

### **Doubling: December 7**

What else about this doubling? Can it be that I twin myself because I had no sibling? A doublement that creates another with whom to share my joys and sorrows (how trite that sounds!)? Uri is my other, the one who must put up with all the



*Figure 58. Disheveled Destinies, 2008*  
Digital photograph

inconsistencies of my life/lives. But this twinning also addresses the self who goes elsewhere momentarily, fleetingly, to follow the line or listen to the voices of children (not laughing here, but screaming in the furnace flames) while the other remains, engaged, in the world at hand. I don't say the "real" world because the world to which my second self goes is equally as real, though with meanings all its own. Delbo (1995) wrote that she couldn't find a way to hold on to the

present, to place herself as an ordinary person—someone who “had not been taken over there”:

I am other. I speak and my voice sounds like something that is other than a voice. My works come from outside of me. I speak and what I say is not said by me. My words must travel along a narrow path from which they must not stray for fear of reaching spheres where they'd become incomprehensible. Words do not necessarily have the same meaning . . . They say, I'm frightened, I'm hungry, I'm cold, I'm thirsty, I'm in pain, as though these words were weightless . . . All their words are false. How can you be with them when you bear only heavy, heavy words? (p. 264)



Figure 59. *Yin Yang*, 2008. Digital photograph

These are the words of my mother, and likewise the words of my imagined grandmother, known only through my mother's words. They have become my

words, and yet they are not. They belong to my other, my second, my twinned yin-yang balance of two spheres of existence that dwell simultaneously within my physical and psychical one. My Other sees me in the spiral, and reaches out her hand. We are trees growing side by side, one on the side of life, the other on the side of death. But we connect and entwine.

### Following the Thrush: December 8

I return from one spiral of memories and doublements to another—the spiraling of my phenomenology of birthing my art. Back to the ovum, the circle,

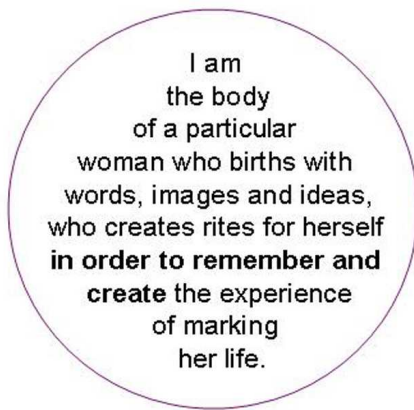


Figure 60: *I am the Body: Part IV*

the womb. **In order:** for the sake of. There is no order I must follow if order is understood as a carefully constructed and perhaps singular path and process. That is why Eliot's *Four Quartets* is appealing: birthing is a spiraling backward *and* forward in time, and a motion that the thrush-as-muse beckons me towards or away from. I enter the labyrinth from where I

am or where I wish to be and dance in its circles. When I reach the center, I am free to stay for the moment, then return. I retrace. I exit. The movement is fluid and simultaneous when I am with the muse. I twitter and flit. I **remember**, remember, reincarnate on the page what has been playing as a filmed chaotic dance in my thoughts and markings or in those of others, and I **create** (not *ex nihilo*, but rather by bringing back into being by marking) a new wholeness (in

image, in remembrance, in personal meaning-making) from the fragments of crumbling leaves.

Fragmented, dry and dying leaves reminds me of the cycle of nature as understood by the Asian notion of *wabi-sabi*, which sees and interprets the beauty in the ruined or decayed landscape as part of nature -- all things to die, return to the earth from which they came, and are reborn in some fashion. This is not in any way akin to saying that those who were murdered at the hands of Nazis were just part of the natural scheme of things. This would be the highest injustice to their deaths. However, it is a way to look at post-Holocaust imagery, particularly the art of Samuel Bak,

who paints the beauty of a decayed and interrupted post-Holocaust landscape in juxtaposition with iconic sagas and heroes from Hebrew scriptures: Noah, Adam, Abraham and Isaac, or the sad, fragmented bodies of angels who seem to be weighted to the disintegrating earth.



Figure 61. *Caught*, 2008. Digital photograph

There is also Brett Ashley Kaplan's (2007) treatment of "unwanted beauty" that takes into account how aesthetic pleasure has itself "been transformed from its earlier use as a survival mechanism in the camps into its later use as a means

of catalyzing Holocaust memory” (p. 13). Beauty is described in several post-Holocaust artists’ work as “sinister” and “tragic,” and I would add my own critique: “suspicious” and “questionable”. My own dialogue with post-Holocaust memories through painting and photographs are open to and could be given the same critique. The photograph, *Caught*, captures the disquieting image of decaying insects in a spider’s web, but it is situated in the beauty of the garden, where petals and leaves create a background of beauty upon which I have chosen to inscribe death and destruction. But insects are not the only subject matter in this photograph: I also see the powerful skeletal hand of the Third Reich—as it scoops up beautiful young Jews walking hand in hand in their gardens and parks, and capturing them in its murderous grip. Perhaps the paradox of beauty with horror captivates both the artist and the viewer to interrogate the memories and the layered meanings of post-Holocaust art.

### Links of Memory: December 12

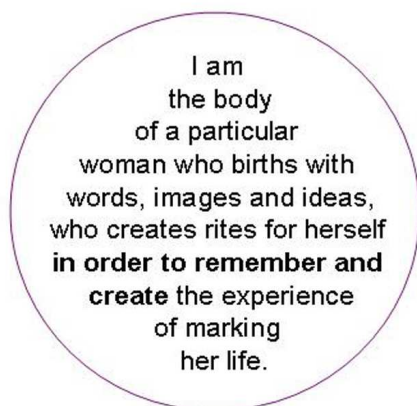


Figure 62: *I am the Body: Part IV*

What do I remember? Memories are fickle for a daughter of survivors—I’ve written this before. I can’t trust them, and yet I must. They are links to before-womb, before-remembering, to a place of touching, hearing, tasting, feeling, smelling. I want this sensory site, despite what it sometimes dredges up in relation to Auschwitz and

Terrence Des Pres' "excremental assault" (cited by Gutman and Berenbaum, 1998, p. 130). But this is my inheritance—I cannot help but re-member as I create through my woman's body. I want a fluid entrance and exit to the swinging door of both solid memory and creation.



Figure 63. *Necklace*, 2008  
Digital photograph  
manipulated and multiplied

What do I create? A necklace of signs and markings whose beads of time present is time past and both are contained in time future: art without end. Ayn Sof, the dark unknowing endlessness. I wear the image of the Kabbalistic tree of life, whose circles of distinct attributes intertwine, intersect, flow like sap in veins through the tree as her living nourishment is shared and tasted by all. This necklace is my multiplied self sharing and tasting the sweetness and the poison memories of selves whose lives float forever now in Ayn Sof. I create for

myself for them.

How do I create? Through re-membrance. My body marked for those who can no longer mark themselves. Body as Torah; body as Book of the Dead.

### **Experience and Moral Function of Art: December 15**

John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934, 2005) is devoted to the creation and educative use of art: "The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to

wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive” (p. 338). Dewey attested to the “moral potency of art . . . [from which] proceeds the liberating and uniting power of art” (Dewey, 1934, 2005, p. 363).

The use of art as a tool for transformation requires that my students and I imagine the world to be a place in which the potential for peace and justice exists. We pick and choose from thousands of images that assault or engage our eyes daily, flashing oppression and hatred, hope and healing—not necessarily as opposing binaries, but as open possibilities. My students choose to act or not to act in transformative ways many times throughout the day. The art they create and the activities in which they choose to engage place them in the realm of hatred or healing, or alternately in the slippery dark space in-between where they must wrestle with their emotions and their minds.

Likewise, when I choose artistic subject matters for the classroom, they can weave with ease throughout the art curriculum to serve as potent visual images, or can stand alone as a pieces of art, accompanied only by my introduction and students’ critique. If I am careful and intentional in offering students meaning-making strategies, they will be instructed in the art of transformation not only through the making of art, but in the re-making of the world.

### **On Experience: December 20**

**Experience:** “practical contact with and observation of facts and events,” NOAD) is a physical activity, a collection of actions performed by limbs, eyes, or



by internal organs of the body. Sometimes experience is that which has been performed by others in some way that influences or affects the creative-I. These external-to-my-self experiences rub against me, pinch me or mark me in some way until I infuse them into the fully-my-own experiences and they become my life—an intellectual phenomenon. Norman Mailer (2003) admonished his readers to follow what he learned from literary critic Dwight McDonald:

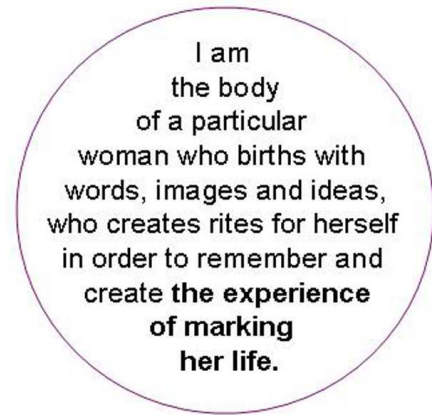


Figure 64: *I am the Body: Part V*

Search for the feel of the intellectual phenomenon. Describe what you see as it impinges on the sum of your passions and your intellectual attainments. Bring to the act of writing all of your craft, care, devotion, lack of humbug, and honesty of sentiment. And then write without looking over your shoulder for the literary police. Write as if your life depended on saying what you felt as clearly as you could, while never losing sight of the phenomenon to be described. (Mailer, 2003, p. 80)

How do I mark the phenomenology of marking? Of marking my life? This is not confessional marking, even though I can ably confess myself within my marking. But I do not do this publicly. Cixous (1998) calls for “circonfession. . .passing one’s head outside of the silk tent, passing one’s own skin, passing one’s own death so as to catch one’s own life by the hair by the mane” (p. 87). I circonfess by marking in the margins between my life, on the page, allowing the lives that I contain within memories (through the silk tent), even the memory-

dream of my own death which beckons me, to push me into an experience I call my own. My own life, my own existence—wrapped up as it is with my memorialized others. These others, including my death, are muses for my margin-marking.

### **Chanukah Break: December 22-January 5**

I promised Uri I'd keep my notebooks and computer closed during most of the break. We are planning a quiet Chanukah—lighting candles and meals with friends, a trip back to the mountains, and long spaces of holding each other close. My daughter and I are doing well; she's growing toenails, even though one website said she's only the size of an avocado! ([www.babycenter.com](http://www.babycenter.com))

I still can't help but remember some of the narratives I've read about women in the camps who were pregnant, including Dr. Gisela Perl's (1993) account of the birth of Yolanda's baby. Perl was a Jewish prisoner who was given hospital duty because of her chosen profession; the job also helped her stay alive. To birth in Auschwitz was a death sentence, so Perl constantly had to take action:

The third day Yolanda's baby was born. I put her into the hospital, saying that she had pneumonia—an illness not punishable by death—and hid her child for two days, unable to destroy him. Then I could hide him no longer. I knew that if he were discovered, it would mean death to Yolanda, to myself and to all these pregnant women whom my skill could still save. I took the warm little body in my hands, kissed the smooth face, caressing the long hair—then strangled him and buried his body under a mountain of corpses waiting to be cremated. (p. 115)

Tell me, what am I to do with this inherited memory?

## Revolution: January 6

I addressed image and text again with my students. The art of Barbara Kruger was a great place to continue the discussion. Her combination of image and word creates visual slogans from cultural experiences, and her work has been described by some as revolutionary and subversive as she attacks sexism and consumerism and pits dominant powers against the bodies of the oppressed. In a skeletal image of a woman's body with the text *Memory is Your Image of Perfection* (1982; see <http://www.mcasd.org/collection/permcollection/artists/kruger.html>), I asked them to interpret Kruger's message:

- Definitely directed towards men!
- Guys always want a perfect body to date.
- To be seen with—
- We want our bodies to be perfect too!
- But it's not the same as when you look at my body, or any other woman's body as an object. When you do that, you start treating me, the person, as object. You see my body as something that you can use, or as something that I need to use to please you.
- Wait, the first word in this is *memory*. I think Kruger's referring to how we remember things in the past, even after the person is dead.

*Go on*, I urged.

- What if this perfect body—like it's an x-ray, right?— is all that remains—

*As a trace?*

- Yeah! Maybe this woman was abused by her lover or parent or oppressed and tortured by her society.
- Maybe she died because she was anorexic or something went wrong in the middle of some plastic surgery procedure. Her own idea of the perfection of the body she desired is for nothing. Just a trace of a physical body on a medical image. The person has ceased to exist.

In another untitled work *Memory is Your Image of Perfection* (1982; see <http://www.mcasd.org/collection/permcollection/artists/kruger.html>), students interpreted the piece as a need for children to engage, like women, in subversive behavior in order to fight the oppressions of parents, society, education and culture. I asked them to further examine Kruger's critiques on dominant patriarchal norms and societal mores. How are they themselves bearers of dangerous memory? What responsibilities do they have to make visible what are now layered, hidden and harmful societal attitudes and oppressive political mindsets?

How will they answer the questions embedded in Kruger's image of the American flag (*Untitled*, 1991)?:

Who is free to choose? Who is beyond the law? Who is healed? Who is housed? Who speaks? Who is silenced? Who salutes longest? Who prays loudest? Who dies first? Who laughs last? (see [http://www.maryboonegallery.com/timeline\\_exhibits/2004-2005/kruger/detail1.html](http://www.maryboonegallery.com/timeline_exhibits/2004-2005/kruger/detail1.html))

### **Talkin' Shit: January 8**

We had a tornado drill today. I herded my students into the spacious bathrooms at the end of the hall. After seeing the boys into the men's bathroom, I went into the women's bathroom with the girls. Thinking that I had a teachable moment on my hands, I said, "Since we're all stuck in here for the moment, let's talk about *Shit*." I could see the faces of students from other classes (who didn't know me except as the art teacher) register surprise and disbelief—maybe disgust?.

“No, I’m serious,” I said. “There is a show in a gallery in New York called *Shit*. Andres Serrano is the artist, and he photographed over 60 piles of excrement from various animals and people—including his mother!” We talked about this show and another piece, *Piss Christ*, both of which either makes people want to burn the gallery, or applaud him for capturing the beauty of a natural function of the body.

When my students and I returned to class after the all-clear signal they wanted to revisit the notion of excremental assault; they wondered how it can be discussed artistically and wanted to probe deeper into its theological meanings. I shared with them the art of Nigerian painter Chris Ofili, whose canvas of a Black Virgin Mary consists of elephant dung as pigmentation as well as small reproductions of female genitalia attached to the background—a double whammy for devout Catholics! (see [http:// www . artnet.com/magazine \\_ pre2000/features /saltz/ saltz10-08-99a.asp](http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/saltz/saltz10-08-99a.asp)). We looked at images of Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, which caused an outrage years ago, and his photography show, *Shit*, which opened in August at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in NYC (see [http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2008/08/ piss\\_christ\\_ photographer\\_ andre .html](http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2008/08/piss_christ_photographer_andre.html)). Both Olifi and Serrano use bodily fluid or excrement to comment about humanity, divinity, and themselves, raising that which is produced and expelled by the body to a theological and biological level of understanding. Or is it just so much bullshit? I asked students to decide for themselves how they wished to view Serrano’s and

Ofili's art. Time ran out and we left the excremental assault of the Holocaust for another day.

### **Holocaust and Excrement: January 9**

The Holocaustal excremental assault is a different kind of deep exploration that digs into the very grave of the profane. Melissa Raphael (2003) described Auschwitz (she uses this camp as a sign for all others) as

a profanization unto death because profanization was the means by which unchecked patriarchal power made all things available (that is, profane) for its own use, having forcibly removed them from the protected sphere of the holy. Here, the profane was . . . both the quality and product of a kind of patriarchal domination that colonizes, breaks, spoils, wastes or uses up what is holy to God and appropriates it for the expansion of its own power and sphere of opportunity. (p. 63)

The Nazi plan was dehumanization through breaking and wasting Jewish bodies among others. Their procedure: place us in a daily site of excrement, where dysentery and disease take hold of the body, causing it to expel unwilling and unchecked all that we have put in it—watery cabbage or potato soup and a slim slice of hard bread—to reduce *us* to that very substance with which we soil ourselves. We become the excrement, in Nazi minds and mission. I cannot make art or write without this excremental past.

Nor can I do so without the woman body into which I was born. This is a matter of politics as it is biology. It is as woman that I acknowledge in creative form the life experiences that have been impacted in some way by a patriarchal writing of cultural, religious, academic and political norms that have not allowed

women at all times to exercise their rights as artists, writers, philosophers, theologians, theorists . . . the list spirals on.

### Artful Birth: January 13

My life is that of a woman. A woman who has artfully birthed, continues to birth, and will give birth and, for whom a menopause of creative activity is warded off like a plague, with talismans and chants! A woman who writes poetry, plays, theology, and theory. Sometimes even songs. Who paints, draws, photographs and quilts herself into multiple existences. I cannot help but mark my woman's body as a theological, philosophical and political site as I create. Not to do so would be to

"make myself a man," as the writer of the Gospel of Thomas (v. 114) seems to urge women do. I refuse.

(NOTE:

*Most scholars agree that the*



Figure 65. *Unfolding*, 2008. Digital photograph

*Gospel of Thomas was written between mid first-century to mid second century CE, prior to 140 CE. This saying was added to the collection at a later date. It continues to be a highly debated and examined saying.)*

### **Marking on the Pregnant Body: January 15**

I dreamed that my pregnant body was tattooed—not with a number like my parents—but with poems of love from Shir haShirim and beautiful images of making love in the orchards and mountains. Tattoo me as a sign of mother-love.

Dora Apel shared the story of Marina Vainshtein, daughter of Soviet Jews who moved from Ukraine to Melrose, CA in the late 1970s, where they settled in a neighborhood of mostly Russian Hasidic Jews—until the punks moved into the neighborhood in the 1980s. Vainshtein found herself not knowing how to express her Judaism and her “otherness” among the punks in her public school until she decided to “embrac[e] the punk aesthetic” and get a tattoo” (quoted by Apel, 2001, p. 308). Vainshtein also became a vociferous reader of Holocaust literature and, as Apel (2001) wrote, for her

as for many Jews, being born even decades after the event did not prevent the Holocaust from playing a defining role in shaping her identity. It can be argued that the Holocaust stands behind any contemporary sense of Jewish identity, whether it is addressed obsessively, ambivalently, or not at all. (p. 308)

Vainshtein began to cover her body in tattoos based on Holocaust imagery and words. The Los Angeles Times featured her almost fully tattooed body in the late 1990’s in a full-page photographic article, causing those in her Orthodox community to rail her for her violation of Jewish law which prohibits marking the



skin with tattoos. She responded about how her external marks represented the scars within. Apel suggested that she

reclaims the body of the tattooed Jew . . . . as a form of explicit personal commemoration and a continuation of historical memory, the “internal scars” of a people made visible on the body of one of its young. To demonstrate her belief that the postwar generations must carry on the memory of the Holocaust, she places her own body between the past and future as a barrier to forgetting . . . . [Vainshtein] defines herself as a Reform Jew and the most important principle of Jewish faith for her is the concept of the mitzvah . . . . performing an act which fulfills a commandment or precept . . . . one could argue that as a sign of an irreversible and public commitment to her Jewish identity, Vainshtein’s tattoos ironically constitute the performance of a mitzvah, because, according to the Torah, it is a mitzvah to be seen in the world as a Jew. (2001, pp. 308-309)

Several of my friends are “tattooing” their pregnant bellies with henna. I am inclined to design my Shir HaShirim dream and bare my belly for the henna. Will my daughter feel the gentle touch of the henna on my skin? Will she sense that love conceived her and carries her towards birth?

### **Desire: January 20**

There is sometimes serenity in pregnancy, of my child and of my art, after the initial vomiting forth of unnecessariness and fear of the uncertainty of being writer. It comes, however, accompanied by the sleepless night. A “woman in love” (thank you, D. H. Lawrence). In Desire. The writer-I, like the speaker-I, slip from meaning to meaning with one word. The English word used for Plato’s *eros*, “desire,” can express a want, a wish or a craving for; a request for; a sexual passion or lust for. The etymological tracings go back to Old French, then further back to Latin *desiderare*, “to await what the stars will bring.” Aha! The Oracle of Delphi! Hopefully good fortune will arrive.

Within the English “desire” is the visual “de-sire”—to un-beget (the begetting, of course, often occurs because one desires). I can fold meaning into (other) meaning, even from life (desire and begetting) to death (de-siring) of the father-mother author who desires to sire. I imagine mythical positions. I can be on top of my meaning like the mythical first-wife Lilith (found first in Jewish midrash and kabbalistic texts, later in feminist theory), or I can become the Oracle, predicting into actuality my art and writings, my theories, my philosophies. This desire, this love, is what Cixous (1991) refers to as “The Gesture”:

Everyone is nourished and augmented by the other. Just as one is not without the other, so Writing and Loving are lovers and unfold only in each other’s embrace, in seeking, in writing, in loving each other. Writing: Making love to Love. Writing with love, loving with writing. Love opens up the body without which writing becomes atrophied. For Love, the words become loved and read flesh, multiplied into all the bodies and texts that love bears and awaits from love. Text: not a detour, but the flesh at word in a labor of love. (p. 42)

### **Midnight Desires (Feedings): January 25**

My pregnant desire to create sometimes results in midnight or pre-dawn awakenings. I have tastes for odd nourishment and I go to any length to feed myself. I am wide awake and searching for a taste, gulping what could be language-cravings of coffee ice cream washed down with the juice of pears—my actual cravings during this part of my pregnancy—a feast of contradictions. I make of the desires what I can in the middle of the night: a rough sketch, a

photograph of a shadow. After hours, days or months of feeding, I will give in to contractions and an urge to push things forth.

### **Eve(ning) of Ghosts: January 30**

I saw three ghosts tonight when I awoke mid-night to write. Not uncommon at all. Not for a daughter of survivors. Tonight, they wore their ghostly presence like gossamer garb beyond my awareness. I saw them as the ones to whom my birthed page will be presented. Like the Man (Adam) who stood beside Life (Chava/Eve: mother of all living humans) at the serpent's tree, saying nothing, but accepting the wisdom fruit from the Mother, his vocal, tasting partner. I keep these to-be-gifted ones in the periphery of imaginative vision as the child grows. As I have received creative gifts of others, perhaps my others will receive my gift with kindness.



Figure 66. *Daughters of Eve*, 2009  
Digital photograph with markings

(NOTE: In the Hebrew text in the second creation narrative (Genesis 2), Adam is situated beside Eve at the tree; he says nothing as Eve and the serpent theologize about what God told Adam. God said-she said-he said-talking serpent (!) said. A feminist/queer reading questions Adam's silence in the discussion and points out his complicity in the moral choice Eve

makes—that is, to be the author of her own life of theological choice and argument. Students in my Art and Bible class read and made art from these stories.)

### **Midwifery and Craft: January 31**

At times I see my markings as the practice of midwifery *and* the giving of birth—simultaneous acts. Is this midwife-mother position the privilege of a woman? Perhaps. Derrida (1981) quotes Socrates in *Theaetetus* 1501-151b: “I am so far like the midwife that I cannot give birth to wisdom . . . . Heaven constrains me to serve as a midwife, but has debarred me from giving birth” (cited by Derrida, 1981, p. 154). Why can’t Socrates give birth? Surely it is because he needs the mother, whom he and other “fathers and sons” have excluded from fulfilling their place in the voicing and marking of wisdom. Socrates can only birth the words of others, as midwife. It takes the mother-womb:

trace . . . receptacle . . . . matrix, womb . . . that is never and nowhere offered up in the form of presence, or in the presence of form, since both of these already presuppose and inscription within the mother [for the creative] process of abstraction . . . [through which one must] separate or detach an object from the ‘place’ it occupies. The metaphor of mother (or receptacle, matrix, nurse) allow us to imagine a container, an open, expanding and contracting space which, according to Plato, ‘is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water, or any of their compounds, and any of the elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.’ (Derrida, 1981, pp. 159-60)

While the womb metaphor for Plato, as pointed out by Derrida, seems not to be enough and must lead to a third, eternal “nature,” I find that it is within the womb of the mother that the possibility of “all things” that can be birthed through contractions and even through contradictions. Within the womb, “all things” mix it

up and are in fluid flux as to their appearances and symbols until birthed. That



Figure 67. *Blood Womb Moon*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

which is within the womb is hidden from the “face of the father,” rendering that absolute patriarchy and power as inscribed in traditional philosophy absent, thus creating the womb-space for the “movement of difference” (Derrida, 1981, p. 167).

My upcoming photography exhibits could be to blame for this congregation of Shoah specters who seem to dance around my bed at night, as though protecting the womb-child with their haunting. Or the wind that howls outside my curtainless window in the dark winter night.

### **“Other Side”: February 1**

One of the local coffee shops held an artists’ café last night. I displayed some of my recent photographs in which I dialogued with my “living” dead. Some of the images were blurred, momentary, and sometimes hard to interpret. I described my work as not fitting the usual understanding of a photograph which often seeks to capture a scene or event in time. My photography begins there, but even as I frame my work in the camera it is often already on the “other side”

of reality. I seek shadows, corners, the slight or blatant digressions of what we would call “normal.” It is my intent to “queer” the scene—to make the viewer look again to see what my intentions are. I manipulate the image—mark it, darken or lighten it, disintegrate it. I apply filters, change or remove color. I ask the image to become more or less than what it was as it appeared in my camera lens. Then again, the captured image often manipulates me.

One viewer at the café remarked about the difference in my images. He noted that most photographers have a particular style by which their work is recognized, and asked why each of my pieces seemed so different. I think I explained that I wasn’t interested in fixed images, but rather the fluidity of dream-images, that these resulting photographs were my dreams. What I should have mentioned was that the photographs speak for many who can no longer speak. Their visions cannot be limited to one style, because they issue forth from multiple ways of seeing, interpreting, living. My photographs, then, do not rightly belong only to me, but to the ones who enter my active, seeing third eye when my two external eyes are closed in sleep. In *How the Dead Appear*, the



Figure 68. *How the Dead Appear*, 2008  
Digital photograph

disintegrated figure hidden in the folds of drapes over the door is no longer a stranger to be avoided, but one for whom the door must be opened. I invite in the shadows and the ghosts. I ask them to live again through my art. The inquiry through which I explore meaning is a/r/tography, which, according to Dalene Swanson (2008) is a living inquiry that “offers freedom in the search for shadows that collapse, even as they mark out, the self-other binary and grants us opportunities to speak with the ghosts that haunt our ethical commitments”

(Swanson, 2008, p. 185).

My quilted art pieces, on the other hand, are my own work. So far, the shadows of the Shoah have not entered them.

### **The Phallic Absence:**

**February 3**

Uri was looking over my shoulder as I quilted some of my birthing pieces. He remarked that he (the man) was absent from all of them. I think I even detected a hint of hurt in his voice. For the



Figure 69. *Breaking Water*, 2008  
Watercolor on imported batiked pima cotton; machine  
pieced and quilted

record, Uri is no slouch when it comes to a feminist stance on the equality of man/woman and the resulting rage against both dominant patriarchal and hegemonic stances. He calls himself a feminist. But his papa-ego was deflated when he saw all the breasts, bellies and vaginas minus any physical appearance of the phallus. I assured him that what he was seeing and what I was marking was impossible without him. He still felt invisible. I nodded and reminded him about hundreds of years of women's invisibility and silence in men's canons and galleries except as object of the masculine gaze. He recognized this; we've had many discussions about it. But now that it had become personal as it appeared in my mother-art, he bristled. Why am I not surprised?

#### **Chaos and Order Considered: February 6**



Figure 70. *Chaos*, 2005. Watercolor and collage

I woke up this morning with the image in my head of a watercolor-collage that I did in one of my sketchbooks several years ago. I painted a watery spiral in shades of blue, and the word *chaos* in the outer spiral. I tore and partially cut two other shapes and pasted them on top

of the chaos. I worked intuitively rather than interpretively. I don't know if chaos was positioned on the outer rings of the spiral as an unconscious warning of how



the spiral's force can drown the person who is not aware of its dangers, or as a reminder of the potent waters of a primordial time from which all came into being. Looking at it again today, I now wonder if the collaged shape on the right is the appearance of the phallus that interrupts the chaotic waters of the spiral to impose some kind of lineage or linear order. While lineage is important to me, I will buck against linear order. I want the flux and flow of disruptive oceanic currents.

**My interpretation now is this:** Here in my watercolor, the phallus is not the one needed for the continuation of family, but the one that dominates, forces human "objects" in orderly lines and makes them stand motionless until they fall, lifeless. It is the phallic whip that lashes out at everything that seems to be liquid (including its own semen) and womblike, thrashing until the amniotic fluid has been emptied and life sucked out, leaving a walking dead. In the camps.

### **Panoptical Power: February 8**

Everything traces back to the camps for me. The father who wears a deaths-head is no father. That figurehead is panopticonal power personified. Like the watchtowers in the camps at night that scorched all activity with forced daylight,

the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, 1995, n.p)

How can I hide from this face, which like Foucault's panopticon, sees instantaneously who is out of line? And how is the face rendered in my art beyond the disrupting phallus? How does it appear at the level where fluidity of image and idea allow for the intuitive, creative subconscious to create unhindered by presuppositions and self-expectations? **An**



Figure 71. *Hiding from Dreams*, 2008. Watercolor

## **Unanswered**

**Question:** What if the face of the father is the face of the mother in which the child can see itself mirrored? From what then does the child hide? I wonder how much I fear my own mirrored face in my mother's through the transference of memories. This phenomenon seems to be why I hide from some of my dreams.

## ***Shamor v'Zachor*: February 11**

How easily I slip from nightmare to celebration. The transition has been learned from my parents, who continually negotiate between present and past, nightdreams and daylight. But now, Shabbat—a day encapsulated within time

while seeming to dance beyond minutes and hours. A space for family  
(especially the dead) and friends, encircled in love and memories.



Figure 72. *Guard and Remember*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

### After Image: February 12

Shabbat with friends: circle, summon light  
(two candled flames) into self's second soul  
*Shamor v'zachor* (guard and remember)  
illumination whispered wisdom sung as prayers  
passes present into future; sweet wine raised  
sip tomorrow tonight; unveil the *challah*—  
braided bread—break pass taste  
share it all that we are all  
that we have been  
all that we will be  
all that we have  
*I'olam*  
*vaed*  
forever  
in this  
sacred  
room  
of darkness  
and our beating hearts  
where holy inspiration mother  
wisdom weaves us in her womb

### More Wombs, Braids and Midwifery: February 16

The womb is where I live these days. I murmur to my growing child,  
imagine her changing positions as she floats and turns. Are my words heard  
through the womb-warm waters? Does my baby smile at my voice? I whisper /  
*love you*. Does she know I speak the truth?

My art making is also my growing child, created in the womb-stage of my  
studio. In the “theater” of the womb, the woven braid of language wisdom

(Plato's *sumploke*) plays both sides of the stage as "nontruth is the truth" and "nonpresence is presence." In the womb-space, "*differance*, the disappearance of any originary presence [patriarchal *logos*] is at once the condition of possibility and the condition of the impossibility of truth" (Derrida, 1981, p. 168). I am mother and midwife as I birth creative ideas and actions that begin internally, in the womb of thought, in the enclosed, protected site of pre-birth. There, faint images form out of potent, energetic histories and cultures that swirl in my body as traces of feelings and whispers of the living and the long dead. They take shape in my Imagination, that conjurer. I nurture and urge them to birth. Not without fear and trembling, because who knows where the children come from. Who knows what fathered/mothered them to life. "Once in a while your hand will write out a sentence that seems true and yet you do not know where it came from. Ten or twenty words seem able to live in balance with your experience" (Mailer, 2003, p. 68). I know they are from my specters—those who have passed on, but live beside me insubstantial but alive.

### **Writing on the Walls: February 18**

School was in an uproar today. In the early morning hours, before we teachers had even arisen from our bed, a group of concerned students adorned the walls with words and images that served as a prophetic call to heed destructive behaviors in which some students engaged. These were artistically and cleverly rendered; the students who staged "Operation Writing on the Wall" (as I have named it) wanted to shake students into an awareness of how harmful

their behaviors could be. Several of the messages showed young people using drugs, attempting suicide, self-mutilating. Others showed anorexic bodies. Still others, students' addiction to computer games or shopping. Some students were upset about the graphic nature of art and removed them. They were worried because a group of visitors were expected on campus later that day, and they didn't want a wrong impression of the school to be put forth.

Needless to say, the students who mounted the exhibition were upset. They felt that their rights were abused and their actions erased as one by one the images were ripped from the wall. Emailing in response to the whole event began almost immediately.

My first response was anger that the art had been taken down without discussion, without finding out who was responsible for it and for what purpose it was displayed. I added my own thoughts on email and suggested that those whose fundamental freedoms are removed without question stand on the same shaky ground as did the Jews at the time of the Nazi book burnings. Ideas and opinions, words and images are dangerous to those who want things to be seen in black and white, cut and dry. They are dangerous because they give multiple viewpoints, they trouble the norm, they inspire further action, and engender ongoing dialogue. They slap us in the face with their blatant messages. We retaliate by pulling them down from the walls, whitewashing over them in the city streets, squelching them, burning them, killing them. Henry A. Giroux (2003)

argued that there is a tendency in post 9/11 American society to silence the voices of children from adult discussions and interests:

The United States is at war with young people. All youth are targets . . . . This is a war waged by liberals, conservatives, corporate interests, and religious fundamentalists against those public spaces, goods, and laws that view children and youth as an important social investment . . . . Youth have become the all important ground onto which class and racial anxieties are projected . . . . Schools increasingly resemble prisons, and student begin to look more like criminal suspect who need to be searched, tested, and observed under the watchful eye of administrators who appear to be less concerned with educating them than with policing their every move. (pp. xvi-ii)

I am very quick to write that our school does not enforce this kind of prison-like environment. Students come and go from dorms to classes to dining spaces to sports and theatrical rehearsals. They are not routinely searched and monitored. That is why both student and teacher reactions to the Writing on the Wall images were surprising and disturbing to me. I felt that our students' courageous activism had been burned like Hitler's piles of subversive book. I felt their pain at being dismissed and misunderstood.

### **Diverse Standpoints: February 20**

"Critical thinkers [need] to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, . . . to gather knowledge fully and inclusively" (hooks, 1994, p. 91). This is ultimately what happened after the Writing on the Wall incident. What ensued were meaty discussions. After the students' rights to post and remove were defended and decried for several days by various voices on both sides of the issue, students took matters into their own hands, into their own sense of

agency and authority and began to meet about the issues they had hung on the walls.

I see multiple angles of the situation here, and while I fully understand the consequences of allowing a gallery of graphic teenage angst and potentially



Figure 73. *Writing on the Wall:* Savannah, 2008. Digital photograph

harmful behaviors to remain without any explanation of the rationale for the display (which the students didn't want to do in order to make their point), I loudly applaud and support their desire to engage in what they hoped would be action in a dialogical space. As it turned out, the multiple sites of expression and understanding that resulted from the initial act led to the transformative dialogue that was hoped would be the impetus of the initial "writing on the wall."

**Pop-up Thought:** Barbara Kruger's dance-with-text in her collages reflects her attempt to reveal others'/society's obsessions and secrets.

### **Shades of the Dead: February 23**

At the edge of the walls of the womb, there lurks a certain shadow of uncertainty, of doubt, or, perhaps, of death. Cixous (1993) said that "to begin (writing, living) we must have death," that the dead "are the doorkeepers who



while closing one side ‘give’ way to the other” (p. 7). What did she mean? That to write (or make marks in other ways) is not to forget. Not to forget the dead, the past, the buried, the whispered breaths of “ghosts” in the memory. These dead “unlock the door for us that opens onto the other side, if only we are willing to bear it. Writing . . . is the attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us” (Cixous, 1993, p. 9). My own dead hold the door open for me and bid me enter—or is it an exit, Jean-Paul?—to make forms and letters of fire and ashes, to re-assemble their fragmented lives so as to re-new themselves through me. They give themselves; they gift me and I remember.

### **Womb-Mausoleum: February 25**

I am the  
midwife of the opening  
to the womb-  
mausoleum of  
memories. I am  
mother of holy,  
remembered people  
and things. They  
infuse me with  
sacredness as,  
simultaneously scared



Figure 74. *Dream Walk*, 2008. Digital photograph



and scarred with their markings, I am corrupted as are they with death. I am a woman: in/con/stant sorrow. I dream-walk a *via dolorosa* with my art. There is no way to avoid dancing with the dead here. This death and birth writing is not as simple as opening a door. There is heightened awareness, an attenuated beat of the heart, as life itself depends on the cadence. There is sweat and strain—that certain excremental funk, an earthy bloodiness, that attends both birth and death of art making and writing. I prefer the birth.

### **Beginning Sight: February 27**

**Students:** Trouble your own and others' ideas as you make up your minds about important live issues and events. In the 1960s and '70s, students were urged to "question authority." You too should question. Become your own *author-ity* as you write and act your own lives. Paulo Freire (1970, 2006) wrote:

Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot . . . be reduced to either verbalism or activism. (p. 125)

Theory and practice. Reflection and action.

When I displayed Richard Rubenstein's (1966) utterance, "God really died at Auschwitz" (p. 224) on the Smart Board and waited for your voices, you . . . negated the statement with examples from Jewish history—the return from Babylonian captivity, the birth of Israel. Some of you called Rubenstein a blasphemer. I told you that before you dismiss his statement summarily, before you end any further discussion, before you shut the door on his philosophical and

theological stance, do some research, some further investigation as to why he said it, what he meant by it, how he supported it. Discover his full meaning, and your own examined interpretation of it before you dismiss it as blasphemy. Don't re-act before you act. On the other hand, suppose you say, Okay, I agree with him. God died at Auschwitz. Don't allow another person's opinion, theory, or argument keep you from arriving at your own. Question everything. Question the authority in a theologian's statement, in a rabbi's statement, even (most blasphemous of all!) the Torah's authority. Question it, research it, "turn it and turn it and turn it again" as Pirke Avot tells us to see the multifaceted meanings in everything, activate your own author-ity, then act upon it.

When you further investigated Rubenstein (1966), you found his later statement that

God died in Auschwitz does not mean that God is not the beginning and will not be the end. It does mean that nothing in human choice, decision, value, or meaning can any longer have vertical reference to transcendent standards. We are alone in a silent unfeeling cosmos . . . What then of Judaism? It is the way we Jews share our lives in an unfeeling and silent cosmos. It is the flickering candle we have lighted in the dark to enlighten and to warm us." (pp. 224-225)

I didn't let you off the hook even here: I required that you further interrogate the meanings of Rubenstein's loaded words: choice, value, vertical reference, transcendent standards. You must decipher how Judaism, your own practice and ritual of Judaism, is the flickering candle after Auschwitz. Ponder this in your sketchbooks; act on your own theory with words intertwined with art.

### End of Trimester: February 28

Such an active wrestling I required of my students, and right before the end of the trimester! Oy! They have every reason to be upset, but if the truth were told, I believe they love the challenge. They ready themselves for it, not settling for just getting by or taking the easy way out of an assignment. They are all Jacob, wrestling with what can be understood as a stranger, an angelic messenger, an alter-ego or the twinned concept of his brother as Other in his own psyche. They are likewise all Israel, the one who wrestles with the Divine. Even for a grade. I wrestle with the tightening expanse of my skin as my daughter asserts herself and ascends within me.

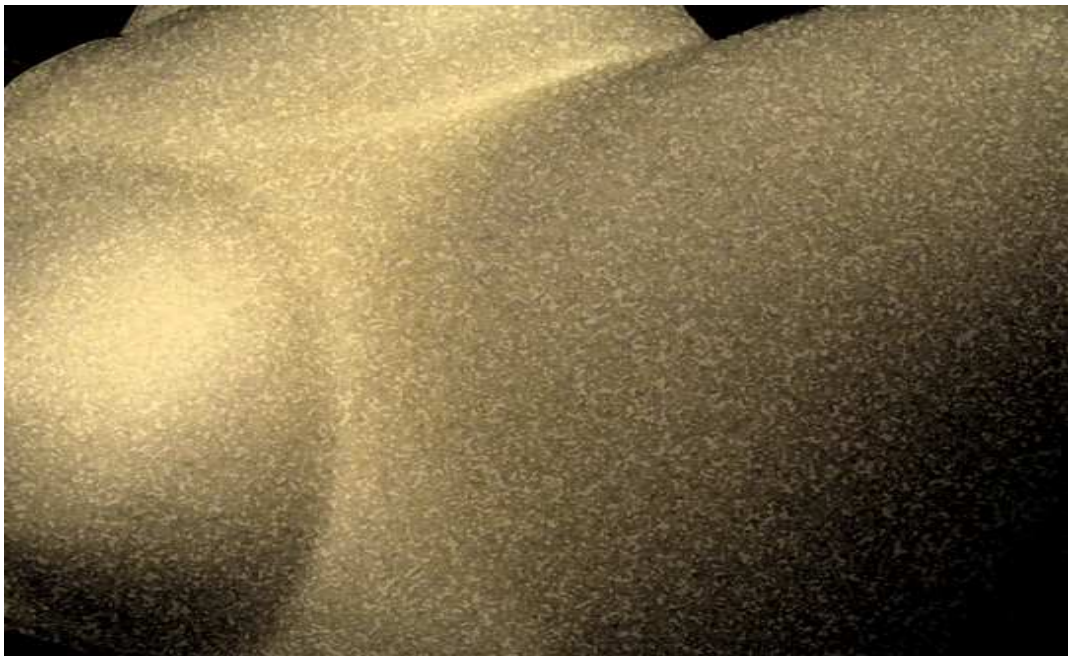


Figure 75. *Ascent of the Daughter*, 2009. Digital photograph

CHAPTER IV  
THIRD TRIMESTER



Figure 76. *Song of New Shoots*, 2009. Digital photograph

**Birthday: March 1**

Six months and a few days pregnant! Uri let me sleep later than usual, and when I awoke, bleary-eyed, he surprised me with breakfast in bed for my birthday. I had a long, restless night of dreams that pushed me like a child on a swing over a landscape of phantasmagorical beings. I know I must have awakened him with my restlessness—it's a wonder he's even speaking to me

this morning, and even more of a wonder that he slipped out of bed without my detection.

He balanced the breakfast tray on my belly—it's not quite big enough yet to be a table, but we both laughed about it. He bought me a see-through negligee. . .said he loved my new figure and didn't want me to hide it under my usual cotton garb. He bought a little black lamb for our daughter too—so she wouldn't be jealous of her mama!

### **Site in Darkness/Death: March 3**

My new negligee has aroused me, I think. Uri too. We made love for almost two hours last night—I was the most receptive to his touch last night than I had been in months. I slept well and got up early to work in my studio before going to school.

In my studio, I am receptive, not mere receptacle, for the conception of the art. I am no virgin who closes tight the vaginal site. I require no lily through which some sacred impregnation should occur after an angelic word comes my ear—a Valentinian-inspired sterile birth that effectively dis-members the woman's body, that eliminates the bodily pleasures of writing, that renders feminine writing an immaculate conception in which all ideas are received only by men an angels, and none are self-created. Who needs this?

I receive the lover-muse and give in knowingly and actively the passion, enact the desire of making love to letters and marks (even on and about my ghosts). Here is the dark side of the womb's door: the necrophilial fascination,

an embodied *eros* of works and acts of the dead. These polyvalent spectral



Figure 77. *As They Were*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

images, desired and desirable descriptors, appear somewhere in the womb-darkness somewhere in my body. Where have they been hiding? Heart—head—psyche—guts? Perhaps everywhere at once. I sense them first as rhythmic pulse. The dead take on renewed shape and sound—written, spoken—sometimes one alone and sometimes twinned with the other (those born into stories, poetry or theatrical scripts). To add another level

of the macabre: I feed on the living dead as they feed on me—a symbiotic artist's rite. I couple with them and feel myself quicken. Are they also made alive? I feel it so.

### **Visual Blood and Tears: March 9**

In Contemporary Art and Issues class today, I asked students to consider how visual artists transmit powerful emotions through the principles and elements of art—colors, shapes, textures, and materials. Every time artists cut ties with the academy or the art world status quo to recreate the meaning of art through subversive themes and unconventional approaches (like Serrano or Ofili), their

art has the power to become a provocative comment on society, particularly for those who find themselves marginally situated in the power dynamics of communities and culture. For a more political example, Kim Ritter, a Native American who traces her ancestry back to the Native Americans who were forced to walk the Trail of Tears, marks with fabrics, paints and quilting techniques to recreate the oppression of her ancestors under the domination of the American government ([www.webshots.com/explains/news/injustice.html](http://www.webshots.com/explains/news/injustice.html).) I asked the class:

*What's happening in this piece?*

- She's using the flag as a sign of suffering rather than national pride.
- The woman's face is the blue field. . .
- And the stars are her tears.
- The stripes aren't straight anymore.

*Yes! She's disrupted our image of the flag. What else?*

- The stripes turn into a landscape—mountains, hills and rivers.
- Rivers of blood.
- There's a jagged line running down the side of her face.
- A bolt of lightning?
- Or the sign of exile and relocation.
- Hey, we just studying that in Jewish History—the Babylonian exile.

*So you interpret this through a Jewish experience?* I asked.

- It's what I know.
- Is that always fair, though?
- Fair? I don't know about that, but it gives us a place to begin—a site of commonality, as Ms. Shalem always says.
- Yeah, but we don't want anyone else interpreting their tragedies through the Holocaust, so why should we do the same thing to someone else's tragedy? Why can't we just acknowledge that each person or group of people have their own unique tragedies?
- We still have to start somewhere.
- For the emotional reaction, maybe. But here, we should start with American History, don't you think?"

*So if you were to reexamine American iconic images, such as this flag, how would you unstitch the quilt of history as patched together through the eyes of a white, privileged, patriarchal government?*

- I guess you'd have to go to original documents of what really happened.
- Or the "after-event" documents that they kept hidden from the public.
- Yeah, not every government or history book tells us everything.

*What? Governments and history books can't be trusted?* I asked, feigning surprise.

- Isn't that what you're always telling us?
- She's being facetious. She wants us to explain it more.
- Howard Zinn.
- That's an explanation? Who's Howard Zinn?
- He's a social activist and historian. Can we pull up his website for a second? It's <http://howardzinn.org>. He wrote a play, too, called *The People Speak*. I think I remember something in it about the Trail of Tears.

We pulled the website up and continued the discussion. I love how art inspires them to push beyond their level of knowledge and their comfort zones. Beyond normality into realms of queer thinking.

### **Making the Familiar Strange: March 13**

The world is queer, because it is known only through representations that are fragmentary and in themselves queer. Their meanings are always relative, a matter of relationships and constructions . . . things themselves are not queer, rather what is queer is the certainty by which we label things . . . normal and abnormal, decent and obscene, gay and straight. (Jonathan Weinberg, 1996, p. 11)

Over the past few days in Contemporary Art and Issues, I planned a lesson around Power Point titled *Queering Art* that I developed from previous work with another teacher (in another format). "Queer" is one of those words that need to be unpacked, particularly in the high school setting where it is overused as a denigrating term for actions, affectations, clothing, thoughts of others.



*Define queer*, I asked my students. They did. I then displayed a slide of dictionary definitions from various time periods. The class assignment was to use books in class, art magazines, or a search engine on the web to find examples of art that illustrated or addressed ten of the above definitions or synonyms of “queer.” I asked students to cut out or make copies of their chosen art and arrange them in their journals, making sure to add the proper labeling (artist, title of piece, year, medium, size, site). If they could find a song, poetry or quote to add another layer to the art, they could include that as well.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE QUEER?				
<b>dictionary definitions:</b>				
strange	worthless	different	questionable	eccentric
shady	suspicious	freakish	unconventional	curious
deranged	unmanly	unbalanced	effeminate	
counterfeit	weird	odd	bad	
<b>synonyms:</b>				
atypical	whimsical	bizarre	unorthodox	touched
unique	puzzling	grotesque	funny	

Figure 78. How Do You Define Queer”

The next day, after sharing and discussing their choices of art pieces, I displayed Alison Saar’s 1995 sculpture *Strange Fruit* ([http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1078/1352446966\\_fccb72c8b0.jpg?v=0](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1078/1352446966_fccb72c8b0.jpg?v=0)) on the screen. I asked them: *What do you see? How do you describe it?* I was impressed when they went up close

to examine the sculpture from the Smart Board and on the computer screen,  
which gave a clearer image.

- I see a woman hanging by a rope tied around her legs.
- She's covering her breasts and her genitals with her hands.
- Is she wearing lipstick??
- Yeah, but I can't see much of her face other than that. I can't even tell if she has hair.
- Her back is curved—
- And her legs are flexed—
- It looks like she's made of aging copper—kinda creepy.
- Or decaying bronze.
- Whatever metal it is, it's aged unevenly.
- She seems to be dying in shame. Even though her face is not very detailed, her mouth is open, and she looks humiliated.
- Betrayed by her lover, maybe?
- There are a lot of indentions to her form, maybe indicating that she has struggled with whoever hung her.
- Her head's almost touching the ground.
- Why isn't she hanging by her neck? That's the normal way to hang someone.

*Some of you are beginning to interpret, so speak more about what it could mean.*

- Maybe it's a metaphor for someone who isn't accepted by society—someone "strange" or "different."
- Someone with no hope, I think, because of the colors and the rope.
- She can't run away from the situation, that's for sure.
- Sounds maybe like spousal abuse.
- Or *partner* abuse.
- It reminds me of how they hang up animals who have been slaughtered.
- Wow! That really takes her humanness away to think of it like that.
- What about the lipstick? Do you think someone else put it on her, like marking her as a whore?
- Or someone who is being sex-trafficked.
- Or a woman? Just because she's physically different from a man?
- Maybe she's like Eve or Lilith—overstepping her boundaries, and ending up bound or abandoned.
- Or a lesbian in a heterosexual world.

They continued discussing for a few minutes, until I stopped them. I told them that the name of Alison Saar's sculpture is *Strange Fruit* and conjures up of Lewis Allan's (the pseudonym of Abel Meeropol, Jewish schoolteacher and

union activist) song of the same title. I played the Billie Holiday rendition of it—the anthem for the anti-lynching campaign “Southern trees bear a strange fruit/ Blood on the leaves and blood at the root/ Black body swinging in the Southern breeze/ Strange Fruit hanging from the poplar trees . . .” (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/feb2002/frut-f08.html>).

I asked them to further queer the image through expansion and intersection. One student remembered the hanging of a young Jewish woman partisan in the Holocaust ([www.ushmm.org/wlc/media\\_ph.php?lang=es&Module](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_ph.php?lang=es&Module)). I showed them a visual remembrance in 2006 of Rwandan victims of violence during the 1994 genocide—not with people hanging, but with their personal clothing hung on lines outside the Murambi Genocide Memorial Site, Gikongoro, Rwanda ([www.daylife.com/photo/038e3FIgrd3M](http://www.daylife.com/photo/038e3FIgrd3M)). They left the room still talking about the sculpture.

#### **A Dream: March 14**

Maybe it was all the images of hangings and deaths that prompted my dream tonight. Uri and I were journeying somewhere. On foot? I don’t know. We stopped at a friend’s house—musicians lived there, I think. We waited by the side, or was it an alleyway? Two people came out; I don’t remember faces or names. They acknowledged us—they were acquaintances — then disappeared around the corner of the house. When they reappeared, it was behind a tall massive man with piercing blue eyes, eyes like glass or at least the glassiness of water in a round glass. He drank me with those eyes. I knew that he could snuff

my breath out with one pinch of his hand. That is to say, I was fully aware of the ominous feel of this man. He told me I was under arrest. He had no handcuffs, but provided a black leather (or was it rubber?) body bag. I stepped inside and he zipped it up. Arrest, it seems, meant that of the cardiac variety. I awoke before I was cut off in the darkness.

### **Next-day Musings on the Dream: March 15**

What journey is this? Uri and I begin the journey, but I end it with someone else—a mysterious stranger with blue eyes who appears from behind the home of our friend. There is a side of a house or an alleyway—allowing for a fragmented and partial visual on the site. One side visible suggests there are others that cannot be seen. An alleyway, narrow passageway between two structures, signals danger or at least the unknown. It is constriction, a way that is difficult for more than one person at a time to travel. Is it the birth canal? Am I dreaming of a difficult labor with a blue-eyed ominous doctor? A doctor who, rather than allow me the natural process of labor, pierces me with surgical instruments to “free” my child? What is the glassiness or the wateriness of the



Figure 79. *Zipped*, 2008. Watercolor

eye? The birth waters under the watch of another? Does someone wish to steal my baby at birth? Mengele floats by in my thoughts, unzipping his fly.

Whose “arrest” is it about which I dreamed? My own? My namesake grandmother’s? Her arrest and subsequent “zipping” into the dark train car by a Nazi with a hard rubber-black truncheon?

Do I fear my own death at birth? Or is this cardiac arrest an indication that something in my (previous/future) life will be balanced out? Am I crawling back into my own womb? Regressing, dismembering, de-living?

I have only questions and a desire to make the dream “real” through rendering it as art.

**NOTE TO SELF:** Don’t show *Zippered* to parents; they see too much death as it is as one by one their survivor friends die. **SECOND NOTE TO SELF:** Never picture my daughter in a body bag, even when I zip her into her jackets and snowsuits.

### **Dangerous Memory: March 17**

Henry A. Giroux (2005) promoted the development of an educational theory that serves “to provide a more critical and comprehensive basis for teachers and other educators to rethink the underlying nature of their political and ethical project . . . to understand and critically engage their roles as social activists whose work is both supported and informed by wider social movements and struggles to change the existing society” (p. 207). He urged educators to become informed of the “political and cultural roles of churches and community

organizations as they operate as part of a wider strategy of resistance and transformation” (p. 208).

Giroux promotes community solidarity and a language that can articulate



Figure 80. *The Place Where He Stood*, 2008  
Digital photograph

the politics of struggle, ethics, and experience and address suffering and oppression. He points out the need for teachers “to recognize youth as an oppressed social category” (2005, p. 212) and to acknowledge the relationship between power and knowledge. Educators, then, become “bearers of dangerous memory. . . .[who] uncover and excavate those forms of historical and subjugated knowledge that point to experiences of suffering, conflict and collective struggle. . . .[in order] to link the notion of historical understanding to elements of critique and hope”

(Giroux, 2005, p. 213). Another connection to Howard Zinn, I think.

This task calls for resistance and risk, actions to which our school has been open, for the most part. A few years ago, our theatre department went to a

performance of *Bent* (Sherman, 1979), about the fate of gays in the Holocaust as they were assigned to concentration camps and forced to wear pink triangles. What our students learned is that there are always more truths than what one person wants us to believe. They saw characters who were seemingly unlike themselves in many ways, but gradually, in the dark of the theatre, as they saw the subtle or violent shifts in stories, opinions, interpretations of the characters' lives and situations, they were required to shift their own perceptions (of gays, of love, of the power of words, of the Holocaust as memory primarily for Jews). I am not suggesting to myself or to my students that Holocaustal death or any other death has a meaning, but the outcomes or memories of the event creates a certain image in the human mind that when double-exposed with other images, allows us to connect events in order to understand life.

I wonder how all the images that are doubled, tripled, quadrupled in my memory will print themselves on my third generation baby.

### **Learning to Die: March 18**

I want to connect all markings of the creative impulse to Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) "being-for" the other: "The being-for . . . means an emotional engagement with the Other before it is committed . . . to a specific course of action regarding the other" (p. 62) But I want to twist Bauman's intention and to reverse his characters. Bauman wants to place the Other we see in a world of conformity, indifference and finitude into an open site of emotional engagement. I agree with this if I am in the world of the living. But I want to place myself there

as I relate to the Other in my dreams. Using Bauman's (1995) words and meaning for the Other, I queer his meaning:

Emotion [through speaking with the dead] pulls [me] from the world of finitude and stereotyped certainty, and casts [me] into the universe of the [dead Other and of] under-determination, questioning and openness . . . [and] emotion [in remembering the dead] extricates [me] from the world of convention, routine and normatively engendered monotony, and transmits [me] into [the Other's] world in which no universal rules apply. (p. 62 with my bracketed additions)

As I practice a "being-for" towards others in realm of the dead, I place myself, through my wide-awake art making, in a liminal position where I can give living words to those who can no longer speak alive. Perhaps I am attending to Freud's

unconscious reality that haunts one's conscious reality like a revenant being . . . traces of knowledge denied, of deeds left undone, of eyes averted from pain, of shades drawn, of moments when it might have been possible to ask a question or resist, but one didn't ask and one didn't resist . . . it is a matter of seizing those chances now, of constructing an alternative legacy out of the archive of symptoms and parapraxes that bear witness of what could have been but was not. (Santner, 1990, pp. 152-153)

Santner writes particularly of post-war Germany's guilt for the Third Reich's crimes against humanity, but I can just as easily bend his ideas to my dreams as I bear witness to the children burned alive—precious lives that could have continued outside camp gates, but now only live in others' dreams. I am less than clear on how dream-witnessing works, but my revenants are there, and I honor their presence and the unspoken words they present to me to speak for them.



### **Dancing with the Dead: March 20**

Cixous (1993) uses dreams—calls it the “school of dreams”—to experience what she refers to as an “extreme familiarity with extreme strangeness” (p. 80). Her sense of writing through the dream involves leaving the self to go away: “How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure? One must walk as far as the night. One’s own night. Walking through the self toward the dark” (p. 65). It is indeed a queer way of writing.

Dreams—particularly those we have of the dead—are freely used as wellsprings of ideas by Colm Toibin, through his fictional character, novelist Henry James. Toibin writes that those who have passed on can now have their destinies controlled by the writer. He/they—Toibin and James together—wonder “if this had happened to other writers who came before him, if Hawthorne or George Eliot had written to make the dead come back to life, had worked all day and all night like a magician or an alchemist, defying fate and time and all the implacable elements to re-create a sacred life” (Toibin, 2004, p. 106). This is the task of the master writer, who holds within his or her words the power of (re)creation.

### **Living-through Death: March 22**

Toibin’s notion of the “re-creation of a sacred life” is a holy task; I interpret it through my parents’ stories. There is a living-through the deaths of others I have known and loved over the years. When I incorporate them in my art or poetry, I

re-create their sacred lives, or at least re-live in words and art the paths and experiences they walked and lived during their time next to me or mine next to them vicariously. I allow them to live through my markings.

But I always seem to allow positive events to live, and banish the difficult shared experiences, the not-so-enticing aspects of various personalities, to some netherworld. I know that at times, the shades of these not-so-sacred, scarred acts must be reconstituted to be faithful to the sacredness of a real life.

Otherwise, they claw their way out/in as hellish, nightmare-monsters.

### **Birth Day: March 25**

Today is my mother's birthday. Two months from my due date—Birth Day of my daughter. Generation Three.

### **Dance Me: April 2**

My dreams are becoming more vivid the closer I get to Birth Day. Why is this? They are not always "good" dreams. They wake me in a way I don't want to be awakened. Lately, as I dream, I experience a "being-for" the dead and their body of words, deeds, theories, before I can bring them, and myself, back to life. I dream of my own impending death (as indicated in one dream segment); when I awake, I hear the zip of body bags. I close my eyes and ears to this dream—it isn't one that I wish to share with my unborn one. I'd rather dream the dead dancing. Believe me, the dead can dance!



Figure 81. *Dead Dance*, 2008. Digital photograph with markings.

#### **Ascension: April 4**

To live is to die, to take part in my own death as another destination towards which I set my face. My body, like my grandmother's, will be dead and will be buried, perhaps by Uri or my daughter, and I will be remembered by them

as a specter in night dreams, who enters unannounced into the dark, futile womb of their imaginations.

The womb of writing becomes, in Alison Landsberg's (1997) words, a “transferential space of telling. . . [that is not] ‘therapy’ or ‘cure’. . . but rather a mechanism by which memory and affect get transferred from one person to another” (p. 72). And so, to life! To death! To re-birth!

In *Ascension*, I wrestled with the idea of the spirit rising from the Shoah's pits of death. The

physical body is a buried, forgotten skeleton, but the spirit escapes/transcends the confines of its earthly burial ground to soar to the visionary imagination (repetitive and abundant) as I



Figure 82. *Ascension*, 2008. Watercolor on canvas

carry it forward with

me. I live presently in the future that was never a possibility for my grandmother once she was pulled off the train and beaten towards the gas. I create another possibility by imagining her ascended or as reincarnated through myself or my embryonic daughter.

Yet even as I contemplate what emerged on the canvas, I have a difficult time thinking about a spirit/body dualism. I imagine my dead embodied and very much alive. I see their arms, their legs, their torsos—they appear to my insufficient eyes as insubstantial, ghostly forms. It is not as difficult to imagine skeletons in their pre-existent forms; somehow life is easier to drape on them like clothing. But how does the body of one burned to ash remain? As a smudge? As a grey-white trace as when someone is open-shutter photographed walking across the room? Interestingly, it is the trace of feet that present themselves more substantially, as if trying to remain grounded to the place.

*Ascension* was intuitive—I painted colors, and they took shape, sometimes apart even from the intention of my hand holding the brush. As I look at it now, I see that what I had assumed were columns of water (perhaps suggesting the fluidity and fluctuation of memory over the space of years) is now very much like Masada. The fenced-in Holocaust Jews at the top could just as easily have been the Jews hemmed in by the Romans in their mountain-top city. The difference is that Masada's Jews chose to take their own lives. My grandmother's life was taken from her.

I also question how much of myself is in this painting. Is a part of me also in the grave with Grandmother Aliza even as I fly to visionary heights where I can view everything without restriction or construction? Is the great red serpent the wave of wisdom that sends me upwards? Am I, the woman—a re/member/ing of my grandmother—connected to the tree of life to the right of the painting? Am I

Life/Eve—the mother-to-be who carries on the family line through the birth of my daughter?

At the back of my mind I hear the “tsking” voices of critiques who say that no hope is allowed through Holocaust art. I hear Marla Morris (2001):

I stress that we must work to undo these deeply ingrained beliefs in happy endings . . . . There is nothing happy about the Holocaust . . . . Memory work is the work of justice. It is an ethical project that dares to take the plunge into the unthinkable. Memory work is a way of coping. There is nothing liberating about it. (p. 201)

I agree. I cannot accept a happy ending to the murder of my relatives and my parents’ friends. So perhaps the eye in my painting is Cyclopic, and the serpent Medusaic. But Morris’s “coping” demands that I plunge into the abyss, that I find a way, in the creative waters of memory, to “lose everything” as Cixous (1991) wrote:

They have taught you to be afraid of the abyss, of the infinite . . . . Don’t go near the abyss! If she should discover its (her) force! If she should, suddenly, take pleasure in, profit from its immensity! If she should take the leap! And fall not like a stone, but like a bird. If she should discover herself to be a swimmer of the unlimited! Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything! . . . . Listen: nothing is found. Nothing is lost. Everything remains to be sought. (p. 40)

While Cixous was writing herself into a *feminine écriture*, a distinct way of writing that privileged her woman’s body, and thus was interrogating the abyss, the *Ayn Sof* (“no end”) nothingness of dialoguing with infinity, a task that was assumed to be for men alone in the past, I bring her thought into a dialogue of my own with Morris, therefore relating it to the Holocaust. Theologian Arthur Cohen also

referenced the abyss when he described Nazi death camps as *tremendum* and caesura, break, rupture: “the discontinuity of the abyss” (cited by Morgan, 2001, p. 146). Cohen flipped Rudolph Otto’s meaning of *tremendum* as the numinous and divine presence into the negative of the Holocaust event. He suggested that to understand the Holocaust as *tremendum*, one must cut the *tremendum* from all other events and objects by “descending into the abyss” (cited by Morgan, 2001, p. 147). Cohen interpreted the Holocaust as historical event and as something cut off from even a theological understanding. But how does one descend into the abyss that is Auschwitz? I do so in dreams. My parents do it in their own layered nightmares. Can we escape? Can we make anything positive of the Holocaust?

The event itself will always remain mired in the degradation and negation of human life and dignity by those in power. But must we stay in the mire? For some survivors, there is no escape from memories, and no adequate way to talk about life there or here. My parents and other survivors have had to reenter a world whose vocabulary, though spoken with the same words, signifies completely different experiences. They have learned to cope as best they can with that melancholy part of their life that will always remain central, even in joyful events such as marriage, the birth of a child or grandchild.

My 2<sup>nd</sup> Gen’er way out is through art and even this blog. I have been tossed into the abyss of what was, is and will always be in my psyche and written on my body. But I know how to swim in the murky darkness. What I know, I pass

on as Giroux's dangerous memories to my students, and ask them to locate power, ignorance and blind belief in my/their inheritance of Shoah memories. I urge them to work as hooks does on transgressing the normative to find a way to create from their own inherited memories. Even if they don't know what they mean.

### **"Best Unknown Known": April 6**

The thing that is both known and unknown, the most unknown and the best unknown, this is what we are looking for when we write. We go toward the best known unknown thing, where knowing and not knowing touch, where we hope we will know what is unknown." (Cixous, 1993, p. 38)

In the going toward the "best unknown known", I often find that something happens in the act of art making . . . some magical element shows up and makes meaning where I have no (awakened) awareness of it existing. It is almost epiphany, enlightenment – images or words traced onto the page with as little awareness as I have at that time. And yet, sometimes, there is more that shines out after the fact, whether in a re-reading/re-viewing or in another's reading or viewing of my marks. An example of this is my photograph of the bowl of cherries (posted earlier); it was not until after I viewed the photograph closely that I discovered the dancer and the hand near the rim.

### **First Night of Passover: April 8**

For the past week, I have been emptying my kitchen cabinets and drawers of *chametz*, all things containing leaven, in preparation for Passover. Tonight is the first *seder*, the first of two ritual meals shared with family and friends in which



we remember and retell the Exodus from Egypt through ritual enactments: four cups of wine, *matzah*—the unleavened bread eaten by the escaping slaves, calling out the ten plagues and removing ten drops of wine from our cups in remembrance of the suffering they caused, singing spirited songs, chanting the story of our history. My family uses a *Haggadah* (the book that contains the ritual) that shows artistic renderings of the *seder* through Holocaust references. So even on Passover, I cannot escape the images of death. Pharaoh and Hitler, Egypt and Auschwitz are conflated in Jewish thought.

#### **Memory and Activism: April 9**

Right before Pesach break, I introduced my Contemporary Art students to Cixous' idea of "the unknown known" and asked them to explore it to find connections between their own Jewish identities and the identities of others in the wider world. They talked about transgressing borders; they wanted to try to imagine something beyond their sometimes sheltered lives. I showed them Philippine artist Pacita Abad, who tackles issues of identity and immigration through her painted and quilted art (<http://www.eyeconart.net/history/postmodern.htm>). Her imagery suggest the naiveté and assumptions of some immigrants as they arrive in America, land of opportunity and wealth, where one can be educated so as to erase the memory (and accent) of one's birthplace and social place. Abad's pieces uncover the less than welcomed "truth" about American reality.

The bold colors of *I Thought the Streets Were Paved With Gold* (1991) belie the lost, unsmiling expressions on the faces of the immigrants as their dreams are dashed and they find themselves in one low-paying job after another. The solidarity of the community of new immigrants may be the only power that protects and insures their survival. Instead of remaining separate in their personal spheres of poverty and injustices, better that they join in solidarity to make their voices heard, and to force changes within the political systems that oppress them. I asked my students to imagine how their own overlapping communities could come together to make much-needed changes in the lives of immigrants.

Abad's 1991 *How Mali Lost Her Accent* (<http://www.eyeconart.net/history/20th%20c./PostModern/AbadMoliAccent.jpg>) portrays the seeming success of one Asian young woman as she stands amidst the campuses of Ivy League and other top-rated schools. Her lips turn upward in an almost obligatory smile, but the entire scene is hazy, covered by scratch-marks that seem to obscure her identity. Her eyes gaze on something to her left, as if to avoid face-to-face engagement with the viewer, who is possibly a member of her own family as they wait for her to return home—a return that may never occur.

I asked students to question the deeper political meanings of an Americanization that functions to strip national and cultural identities from new immigrants or that keeps them in underpaid jobs without benefits or job security. I also suggested that they examine the place of the Jew in America:

*How can changes occur? Are there both strengths and weaknesses in an American education for a foreign student? What happens if a student chooses not to return to her birthplace? Or returns only to find her American way of life unacceptable to the mores of her family and country? Why is the memory of her birth identity important not only to her, but also to her family, her country, and, if she remains in America, her individual and social American identity? Can you be both Jewish and American in the cultural, social and political climate of the time? What might it mean experientially, socially, culturally and religiously for you to make aliyah to Israel? What happens to your American identity then? In Israel, who is "other"?*

**Fickle Memory: April 10**

*simu lev.* pay attention!  
give me your heart  
and I will give you  
the pulse of memory  
over which  
I have no command  
memory is fickle  
hands us a world of its own  
one moment  
I casually tap my foot  
in rhythm to a song  
on the airwaves  
the next second  
I see the rhythm  
of a heart beat  
dissolve  
into flatline

---

on the monitor  
in my dream  
but there is  
no monitor  
there is gas  
clawing

choking  
 agonizing  
 death  
 say the experts  
 those who  
 died  
 say nothing  
 I try  
 to remember everything  
 the others say  
 about  
 how my grandparents  
 died  
 by gas  
 in locked room  
 filled  
 naked scared shamed  
 wailing praying cursing  
 I remember stories  
 children thrown  
 into furnaces  
 alive  
 I dream myself burning—  
 as a witch—  
 my nightmares  
 scream me awake



Figure 83. *Burn Witch*, 2008  
 Digital photography

Uri holds me as I wonder how much of this midnight trauma my daughter  
 will inherit.

The dreams I remember remembering (a doubling of remembrance—  
 suspect already) are often brought on by exterior events or visuals prompted by  
 yet other memories inherited from parental narratives of life *then*. Of death *there*.  
 Sometimes I remember good things. Safe things. A shared potato, a recipe  
 conjured up on a winter night when the wind howled. Other times, the darker

memories, the ones I thought I/they buried long ago, assault me like an unexpected slap. Like a boot kick on my back. Regrets, regressions, reverberations of what could have been, what could have been done, what could have been their life.



Figure 84. *Line Up*, 2006. Oil on plastic forms; mixed media collage (inside forms)

I am obsessed with memories. I have spent all my life remembering not only my own past, but my parents' and other Holocaust survivors' as well. I have found that juxtaposing Holocaust memories (the many Sarahs of the camps) with Sarah, Abraham's wife, from the Genesis narratives allows me a dialogical site in which I can speak about traumatic memory. I see each Sarah as she is seen,

taken, selected, shaved, bound, and (sometimes) freed. Each connects to all others.

Con-temporality. How do I live now with what was then? How do I live in the memory of that other world that exists within this world? What do the memories mean for my future? I double back on my questions.

### Re-Doubled: April 11

I keep coming back to the concept/theory of doubling. I think the Passover break has given me extra time to think it. I remember writing in a previous blog that Auschwitz survivor

Charlotte Delbo (1995) conceived the term *dedoublement*, a doubling of the self, to describe a memory technique she and other deportees used to remember their former lives while they were in the horrific reality of the camps. By doubling

themselves, they were able to take themselves out of their minds back to memories of home while still bodily tied to the tasks at hand in labor camps. After release, she wrote that the camps stripped her of her memories of before, one



Figure 85. *Doubled In-Sight*, 2008. Digital photograph

layer at a time, like “tatters of burned skin” (Delbo, 1995, p. 255). Recovery was necessary.

Delbo suggested the notion of deep memory [*mémoire profonde*], which tries to remember the self exactly as it was *then*. Common memory [*mémoire ordinaire*], as she interpreted it in her own experiences, not only re-members the self as it was before and after the camps, but provides detached vignettes of what life was life *then*. In articulating the words through which she told her story, she further differentiated between external, reflective memory [*mémoire externe*] and sense memory [*mémoire des sens*]. Sense memory can’t find words to describe lived experiences. External memory must take over to reflect upon the events and devise words for them. Even then, words are inadequate; thirst, fatigue, body mean different things to those who have lived in Auschwitz and to those who did not. Lawrence Langer’s (1991) *The Ruins of Memory* explored extensively Holocaust survivors’ memories based on Delbo’s exploration of her own.

What interests me is the double visioning of event or the re-doubling after the fact. How does human vision or imagination, particularly that of a Second Gen’er or even one who interprets through vicarious vision, see what others experienced in the camps, in the work fields, in the barracks?

In my photograph, *Doubled-In-Sight*, the pair of eyes at the bottom do not quite double the ones above. Inside the eyes on the bottom is another pair of

eyes that are visible only by increasing the view on the computer to 500%, or by increasing the size of the original photograph.

### **The Ivy and the Memory: April 12**

Deep memory and common memory are entwined for me; I cannot separate them. They, like the persistent vine of the ivy plant, resist cutting and unwinding. Creating art has become a form of healing—the images that have



Figure 86. *In the Whirlwind*, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas

emerged are often kinesthetic intuitions that shoot from the movement of hand/brush on canvas through a connection with sense memory.

Refinements, embellishments to the piece are the result of reflective memory.

I began a painting (*In the Whirlwind*) of my grandfather—who I never knew—as I saw him in a dream, young and vibrant. I knew what I wanted to remember

of the stories about him that my mother told me, and so I painted: He stands in a lake, surrounded by a forest—someplace safe, in nature.



The painting was a disaster. It was contrived, trite, not at all inspired or true to the grandfather-memory I had inherited. I recovered the canvas in swirls of blues and whites, giving over to the sheer physicality of body movement in an almost rhythmic pattern of breath and swirl, breath and swirl. The memory found its way to the surface, in the swirls and the colors.

Interestingly, in another painting, I painted my grandmother as I saw her in flames—reds, golds, oranges—colors chosen to represent my anger at both her death and her absent presence. I finally realized that the piece was not destined to be an emotional expression, but rather one of healing. I again recovered the canvas in order to re-cover the

wellness of my memories. I turned to the calming blues and whites, softened and blurred her image to one that was more readily part of the “natural” world—the moon.

My third painting swirled again, beginning with a series of rolling hills that merged with a woman. I was drawn intuitively to a blue and green palette and a



Figure 87. *She is a Spiraling Moon*, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas

re-presentation or re-formation, through the plant growing out of the arm of the woman, of memory. Three leaves on the plant are a doubling of two families: the one into which I was born, and the family I now have with Uri, including our daughter. I move in and between both families. The leaves also form the Hebrew letter *shin*, signifying a number of words related to my own healing: *shalem* (wholeness and quite wonderfully, my married name), *Shaddai* (a name for God that has connotations of female breasts and nourishment), *Shekhinah* (the female aspect of God), *shamayim* (heaven) and *shema* (listen—in my experience, to my own intuition and kinesthetic abilities that will draw out deep memory into life).



Figure 88. *Shekhinah*, 2006  
Acrylic on canvas

## Experience and Self-Understanding in Art: April 13

The experience of creating memory pieces has allowed me to come into an even deeper understanding of my self, as I draw intuitively from deep memory and then externalize what is bubbling there in the abyss. While not all art that I create comes to life in this manner, it has seemed to be a natural one for memory-work and healing.



Figure 89. Poem and *Pomegranate Flesh*, 2007 Watercolor

## **The Creative Body in Foreplay: April 15**

These intense mark making experiences remind me of my primal bedroom cave scratchings—possessing an urgency to reach some point of light, de-light, write-ing. (W)or(d)gasm. With the possibility of multiple ones. Helene commanded me to:

Write, dream, enjoy, be dreamed, enjoyed, written. And all women feel, in the dark or the light, what no man can experience in their place, the incisions, the births, the explosions in libido, the ruptures, the losses, the pleasures in our rhythms. My unconscious is in touch with your unconscious . . . All I can say is that this “coming” to language is a fusion, a flowing into fusion; if there is “intervention” on my part, it’s in a sort of “position,” of activity—passive, as if I were inciting myself: “Let yourself to, let the writing flow, let yourself steep; bathe, relax, become the river, let everything go, open up, unwind, open the floodgates, let yourself roll . . .” (Cixous, 1991, p. 56)

I think I must roll in the bed with Uri tonight. Well, not so much a roll as an encounter. “Being-with, being-for . . .” (Bauman, 1995). And all that jazz.

## **The Morning After: April 16**

“They” say that a good orgasm helps situate the baby in the womb and can even help with the delivery. Last night was better than good. Uri brought me to tears. *Jouissance*! (I hope none of my students are reading this blog!)

In my art making, a kind of foreplay begins the experiential climax of the “coming” of the art. No visual or written/drawn sign signifies only one meaning. There is no all-knowing, final truth of art, writing, philosophy or life. All plays, is playing, is in play. But in the primal setting of the womb (that is, the site of freedom from the barriers, walls, gates that prescribe one’s movements) I try to touch the erotic places that induce the play, the bathing in senses. I play with



differences rather than just/only similarities. My phenomenology leads me to mark my own experiences as events that can be deconstructed and born anew in meaning and influence. My woman-body is capable of foreplay that attends to



Figure 90. *Triptych: Garden of Life*, 2007. Oil on glass window panes

hidden interiors and exterior sites of words and marks simultaneously as rhythmic pulsing on my tongue and fingertips to release, ecstatically, a flow of forms. *A Garden of Life*.

I am sure I will continue this textual/textural foreplay. Right now, I have to get out of bed and go through the door of the day.

### **The Written Text of the Body: April 18**

**More Fore-play:** The play be-fore textual/textural birth. On the stage of my life enacted in my artful body. I am a constructed woman, a written text and a

drawn figure. I depend on location, family, religion, education, culture and all the other influences in my life that form my individual identities. But when the ink is faint in fore-play, I often find my various selves deconstructed and naked, relying not on that which is within, because nothing there is original. All is passed on, from generation to generation. Fore-play leads to the burial-ground of past bodies even as it leads to a future play-ground, full of paint and ready to explode with creative energy.

I imagine my *Deconstructed Self* as dust and ash. This is the memory of my ghosts as the sun comes up and they fade from my embodied night dreams. It is also the recognition of human frailty and the journey from life to death. There are landforms in the photograph—contours of continents and oceans—the mapping of generations on earth written on my body. My eyes are closed to keep in the visions I see on the other side of my eyelids.



Figure 91. *Deconstructed Self*, 2008  
Digital Photograph

## Nothing New: April 21

Back to class after the long, luxurious Pesach break. When I was asked by one student, “So, what’s new, Ms. Shalem?” I answered that in the words of Kohelet, the writer of the biblical Ecclesiastes: *Ayn chol-chadash tachat hashamesh*. “There is nothing new under the sun. Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, ‘Look! This one is new!’ It occurred long since in ages that went by before us” (Ecclesiastes 1:9c, 10a, JPS). What I come up with in my art or writing cannot be original, but only a new birth of language and form, a new linguistic path or visual pattern—a ripple in a waterless pool—that expands what is already there. The primal site of chaos contains everything that was, is and will be. I am responsible only for bringing it (back) to birth. Remember, I am mapped and marked with continents of memories.

It is Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Uri and I went to the community commemoration with my parents. As we have since we were married. As I have ever since I can remember. *Ayn chol-chadash tachat hashemes*. I remember because I must, or as Imre Kertesz (1990, 1997) wrote:

I do want to remember, I do, I don’t, I can’t help it: if I write, I remember, I have to remember, even though I don’t know why I have to, probably because of knowledge; memory is knowledge we live in order to remember what we know because we must not forget what we know; don’t worry, children, I’m not talking about some “moral obligation,” no, please, all I’m saying is that we are unable, we *cannot* forget, this is the way we were created; we live in order to know and remember . . . (Kertesz, 1990, 1997, p. 21)

I go to remember with my parents that which what I can never fully remember except through them, through their stories, their tattoos, their screams,

their silences, their lives. I remember and light a candle against forgetting. For all who have been lost, for my parents' survival against all odds, for the daughter who is to come—my daughter—

### **Baring and Bearing: April 22**

In the art room, there is no man or woman, I tell my students, not to ungender them, but to allow them to use the metaphor of birth for the experience of bringing their own art to life. The midwife-mother bares her/himself, her/his soul, imagination, and hopes for the act of birth. S/he uses her body to bear the child-art to life. My praxis prior to delivery: breathing, panting, pushing, contracting, encouraging and coaching myself. I have practiced over and over again; I use my hands as partners with my head. Without physical embodiment and attachment there can be no birth. Nor can there be the birth of a poem or a photograph or a painting. William T. Akers (2002) attests that writing for him is not only a psychological but also a psychomotor experience:

While in a stage of flow, the physical act of my writing is undisturbed by cognitive processes. Because external sensory inputs are minimal, my internal sensory awareness is highly activated. It is from this space that images flow through me and into the text as if on their own volition. (Akers, 2002, pp. 58-59)

Flowing. Of their own volition. I remember reading Early Church Father Valentinus' blatant masculinist "mis-conception" of Mary's conception and birth-giving: "as water through a tube"—without pain, without knowing, without feeling. Now, Akers doesn't go there, but I want to acknowledge that along with the remarkable flow, there is also the physical feeling that birth is occurring. I need to



feel the dilation, the contractions, the pain. Particularly when the ideas don't flow.  
When they refuse to exit.

Then the midwife-mother-I  
reach with my naked hands into the  
opening to guide the child out. This  
experience is attentive, anticipated  
waiting, a pacing of the birth activity  
that allows the to-be-birthed marks  
and words to determine the spacing of  
the event. Let me make art standing  
up in this birth when the words are  
breach, or the images temporarily  
dammed, or slow to come. No stirrups!  
No drugs! No doctor with his eye on  
his watch or the episiotomy knife. I

refuse to allow the violent cut of any  
part of my body or the physician's  
forceps forcing the child out for the sake of convenience and timing. Put the  
sword away! None of that! Give me a midwife! Unless, perhaps, the attending  
physician is Derrida, who examines writing with the eyes of a textual obstetrician,  
listening for the heartbeat of words and phrases to massage them to new  
readings and emphases. He is, after all, writes with feminist hand and idea. He,

serenity  
IS A LIE  
of course  
birth  
is  
not always serene.  
I said I would not use a sword  
would not cut  
I can't deny  
the truths of  
experiences  
I reach for  
knives when birth  
feels this unbearable  
I slide smooth steel  
against re- sistance to  
cut a way **birth** out and  
leave a **signscanbe** jagged  
gaping **sluggishinjured** bloody  
hole **needing** how  
unloved **in** stopped  
hard **cuba** pained  
is this **tion** task  
  
I should not have forced them out

Figure 92. *Serenity is a Lie*

perhaps, could be my personal physican. Not so with all others—no! Get them out of the birthing room! Stat!

As I birth, words or images crown the opening, through the bodily stretch that is simultaneously internal and external, little by little, for hours and days, months if necessary, until release. I am on my feet for an eternity, it seems. Serenity, often evident in growing pregnancy, is stretched to its limit. Serenity, in fact, depending on the birth, transforms to anxiety, even to misery. I make it a lie.

### **Birth, The Play: April 23**

I went to see the play *Birth* (Karen Brody, 2006, (<http://www.birththeplay.com/>) tonight with friends. Each birth narrative ended in a sort of heaving relief and joy as the baby was born, even those with great pain and hours of delivery. The intensity of the experience was likewise felt by each of us in the room. The acting “mothers” pushed, sweated, screamed, cursed, howled—got very earthy and physically involved in giving birth. Their acted contractions made me want to pant and push. The one thing I realized: my hope for an easy birth is not going to happen necessarily. It doesn’t happen in many of the creative acts I do. So I reiterate: serenity is a lie.



Figure 93. *Granddaughter* (poem) and *Self-Portrait as Grandmother*. 2009.  
Digital photograph with markings

The womb (Hebrew: *rechem*), is the site of mercy (Hebrew: *rachamim*); I want the art forms that I bear to be compassionate and motherly. But they are not always soft; they can issue forth in steely hardness (the sword again!) when the situation demands. This birth is paradox—an exit from the extended womb, from my open mouth, flowing from my fingers. These sites are fluid in their dissemination; they merge with and become the other. I touch the strained hardness of my stretching flesh. The womb, the belly, the mouth, the hands? I

taste words as they emerge, roll them on my tongue and against my palate. I caress and shape the forms in my hands before I place them on a canvas.

Sometimes forms drip from tongue or hand to page; these are the adoring words, the encouraging signs: teacher/mother shapes. Other times I spit them forth as acts of angry protest to attack injustices. Then they appear on the page in the context of that righteous anger—hard, dark, aimed at indictment: preacher/prophet forms. To birth creatively is to traverse the rite of passage from internal to external language and image, to transverse (breach birth) or to reverse (false birth) the passage. Sometimes, there is no easy way to coax out what refuses to come. I carve the child out. Damn that (s)word!

#### **Dialoguing with Truths: April 27**

There are always multiple and competing truths, I tell my students, something not all of them want to acknowledge as they cling to religious understandings passed down to them by generations of Jews. I understand their hesitancy to hear this. I dealt with it in my own way in my teens when I discovered that my parents' experiences in the camps could not speak for all others'. Each person has her/his personal truth, based on a multiplicity of contingencies. But in relational face to face and speaking with another, truths can be breathed. David Danow was dialoguing with Mikhail Bakhtin when he noted:

Truth belongs to no one; it is realized, rather, in the realm of dialogue, where the linked utterances of the self and the other interpenetrate, yielding a truth which is fluid, ephemeral and evanescent. Not only does it not reside with any *one*, but it is itself contextual, depending on its temporal and spatial configurations, [and] in

the interlacing of the dialogic word of the self *and* the other. (Cited by Drexler, 2002, p. 216)

Interpenetration and interlacing of the truths of two (or more) create a new truth. We can utterly dismiss Heidegger for his denial and silence about what was happening to his Jewish colleagues in Hitler's Germany, or we can dialogue with his words and find him and his books, as did Richard Rorty (1999)

as vector sums of contingent pressures. We shall see Heidegger as one more confused, torn, occasionally desperate human being, someone much like ourselves. We shall read Heidegger's books as he least wanted them read—as occasions for exploitation . . . we shall settle for useful tools, and take them where we can find them. (Rorty, 1999, p. 196)



Figure 94. *Rippled Light*, 2009 Digital photograph

I imagine that my students will begin to open their eyes in college in ways they are unable to now. But their inability to grasp in full what I set before them is not in vain. Something later on will trigger their memory and conversations about art, vision and multiple sites of knowing will fill their understanding with sparks of light dancing on moving waters.

Karen Stone (2003) wrote poetically of the need for openness, patience and an inquiring attitude when looking at art so as to find what in it touches our spirit:

We glance

we respond

with recognition shock laughter bewilderment  
frustration delight

Our response tells us whether or not we want to linger  
to come back  
to see once more

We look

we discern purposes  
we respond

with understanding

Our response tells us how the art may or may not fit  
our own needs at that moment

We observe

we describe what we observe  
we respond

affirming or amending our earlier response

Our response tells us where there is a reason  
to scrutinize the form

We examine

we analyze what we discover  
we break the surface

find visual relationships

learn how the thing was made

we respond

with knowing recognition recollection

identification discernment  
Our response tells use whether there is some reason  
to search further

We investigate  
the artist's life and ideas  
the culture of the times  
the influence of the past  
the impact on the future

we respond  
applying the artwork's genesis  
to our own experience  
answering the artist's  
expression with our own

Our response tells us if the art may have enduring impact  
for our spirit

We look again  
We interpret  
We respond  
We continue  
We see (Stone, 2003, pp. 55- 56)

Stone attended to the need for our response; the words “respond” and “response” are repeated eleven times and indicate our ongoing dialogue with the image. This is a model I have shared with my students as they struggle to break free of their preconceived notions of both art and the one-sided meaning they want to enforce on it.

But what about their preconceptions of post-Holocaust art, particularly in light of the many theologians and philosophers who write of the abyss, the rupture, the caesura between the Shoah and the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What does it mean to create art as a human being living after the Shoah? The Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim (1994) suggested that the Holocaust

calls into question not this or that way of being human, but all ways. It ruptures civilizations, cultures, religions, not within this or that social or historical context,

but within all possible contexts. Hence a *Tikkun* [mending] of the Holocaust (if a *Tikkun* there is) transcends its limited context in significance. It is good news to the world. The thought we are in search of—philosophical, Christian and Jewish itself—will therefore have one universality: that of a witness. Its *Tikkun* will be what in Jewish tradition *Tikkun* is always meant to be—*Tikkun Olam* [mending of the world]. (p.262)

### **The Waves of Writing: April 28**

There are other forms that birth like the breaking of the amniotic waters—they swell out as preliminary thoughts, ones that are nearer to the primal waters of chaos; they hold secrets and mysteries that are (sometimes) unknown even to their mother as they flood out. They can be cleaned up and interpreted later. Set them gently on a soft mattress. Cover them with fleece for protection. But the body of art pushes, is muscled out by mother, guided by midwife. I remember, in the midst of art making or writing, that I am both. Between primal uttering and chaotic breath (this despite the pre-birth practice of order and control), they are born. Yes, there is sometimes pain—gut-wrenching spasms that: force me to scream the form out; keep me awake all night with the labor of the birth; disrupt my days; make me swear dark oaths at those I love, including the child I am birthing. All these bring about what must be born. Halcyon days of pregnant bliss are replaced with hell and longings for death. I swear by the acts of all who bore before me: I didn't ask for this child, I don't want it, I can't bear it, just kill me now and let me dissipate, erase myself and my scratchings, scatter myself among the shadows, forgotten and silenced. I think this, but in light of my family's past, I can't fathom the outcome since I am the voice of lives which would otherwise be



forgotten and silenced. But these oaths are likewise flesh and blood. Why does only bile spill forth?

The midwife-I takes over, calming, counting breaths, massaging anxieties, fears and pain. Wretched, writhing, writing, artful pain! Somehow, I survive. The child is born: "We cannot bear to tell the truth, except in the final hour, at the last minute, since to do so earlier costs too much" (Cixous, 1993, p. 36). But wait! Cixous still wrote about death! I see momentary death at the end of the process of bringing my art to birth. I pinch that breathless second and check to see if my child lives, if I myself still live. But the moment passes. I forget the pain my artful marking or writing caused me in its birth; I know forgetfulness is both friend and

foe. I am content; I feed it milk and honey. I attend to its appearance—clean it up, wipe away the blood, bite off the umbilical cord with my teeth. I diaper and dress it well—for presentation to others.



Figure 95. *Interstice: Leaves and Needles*, 2008  
Digital photograph

### **Interstates/Interstices, or Writing in the Third Person: April 29**

She lives in a state between states of being. At times she is present in the moment; at others, she is swimming in streams of past memories, lost to the time of those around her. Sometimes she steps into an unknown future, tentatively, with fear, not wanting to see herself alone, as her mother was behind the barbed wire—alone in an line with those she did not know.

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps in time future,  
And time future contained in time past. (Eliot, pp. 1-3)

There are the times that she does nothing. She sits and stares at the computer screen seemingly without a thought, but with a deep sadness that she can't even begin to describe. She entertains the possibility that she is to blame for all that went wrong in the past, despite the fact that at least cognitively she knows this to be impossible. She also knows that it was not her mother's fault or her grandmother's fault. No one believed it could happen. No one believed in that kind of hell. She spirals downward in her thoughts.

Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude,  
World not world, but that which is not world,  
Internal darkness, deprivation  
And destitution of all property,  
Desiccation of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit . . . (Eliot, pp.114-121)

Descent, apparently, is what is required for her to gain perspective. Solitude of thought or non-thought puts death in its place. Yet perpetual solitude is not what she desires. Thank God, she has her theories, and she has Uri. He keeps her sane. They talk—and he is there. In the house, making coffee, raking leaves, working at his laptop. Yes, of course, there are the occasional disagreements. After all, he is himself and she is, well, partly herself. But the resonance outweighs the dissonance. Thank God, she says again, that this relationship is not like others she has known—those of her friends’—which dissolved into nothingness—perpetual silence. Like them—the dead with whom she dances at night.

She talks to them in daylight—the dead—wherever they are, which is most certainly not in the ashes that were dumped into rivers, spread across fields, flung into the fragrances of the wind. They do not answer. How can they?

Unless embodied in her dreams, they have no tongues. Their stories are silenced. At least she can’t hear them. But perhaps her hearing is not attuned to the speech patterns of the dead by day. She must focus more on stillness, she thinks.



Figure 96. *Theories*, 2008. Digital photograph

Words move, music moves  
Only in time; but that which is only living  
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (Eliot, pp. 137-143)

Does she hear them? Is the stillness the containment of all wisdom lost in fiery deaths? Even the Torah was burned by Nazi hands. The rabbis taught that the letters never do, that they detach themselves from the scroll and return to the place from whence they came. Is that where her grandmother is? Her grandfather? Her family and acquaintances, known to her through story after story after story? Where is this place where the dead dance?

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor toward; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered.  
Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be not dance, and there is only the dance. (Eliot, pp. 62-67)

The still point. Where death is and is no longer. Where life eternal dances with finite existence. Where all time is gathered in that still point. Will she find her Past-Present-Future there? Her dead grandparents very much alive? Questions without answers now will be as answers



Figure 97. *Stillpoint*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

without the need for questions then. So then and now, she “fares forward,” as Eliot in *Four Quartets* quoted Krishna’s command from *Bhagavad Gita*—a particularly nice synthesis of spiritual thought, in her mind.

She lives her own narrative of “becoming.” What pattern will form, she does not know. She only hopes—as spiritual activity—that her work is good, establishing action out of death and despair, transforming it to a new gestalt. She does not seek meaning from the deaths. There is no meaning to the lives snuffed out by Holocaustal flames. Of this she is certain: In the “as it was” and “is now” and “ever shall be,” (*v’hu hayah v’hu hoveh v’hu y’heyeh*) she has danced, is dancing and is waiting still to dance. With Aliza and the other dead—traces in her dreams of other lives and other stories. At the still point.

### **The Trace / The Trance: April 30**

I read on my friend’s blog that she froze her placenta after giving birth and later put it under a new sapling planted in honor of her son’s birth. How beautiful. What nourished one now nourishes another—an act of Mother-Wisdom, I think. Life-after-birth.



Figure 98. *Placenta Tree*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

Afterbirth—that which remains—the trace, the not-quite visibility that is a reminder of both newborn and the dead—begs not to be discarded and

disregarded as some distasteful other, but rather, as in those cultures that honor earth and blood, to be set aside, to decompose in order to compose: cultivation for future composition. There is a trance-like quality to the traces. . . a dreamlike floating from scene to scene that seems to make no discernable sense. It is

possibly akin to Cixous's observation that "writing is the delicate, difficult and dangerous means of succeeding in avowing the unavowable" (Cixous, 1993, p. 53). I desire to come back to the trace, to find a way to tra[n]ce myself into some transcendent understanding of the gossamer ghosts of their slight impressions. Cixous says her own death would bring it on. But she hasn't succeeded with that. Not yet. And so she dreams to transcend the insubstantial trace.



Figure 99. *Children of the Dream*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

I call my dreams the trance. And play to the death in their foggy light:

“Trace” is akin to “face,” or at least to “re-trace” reveals a “pre-face,”

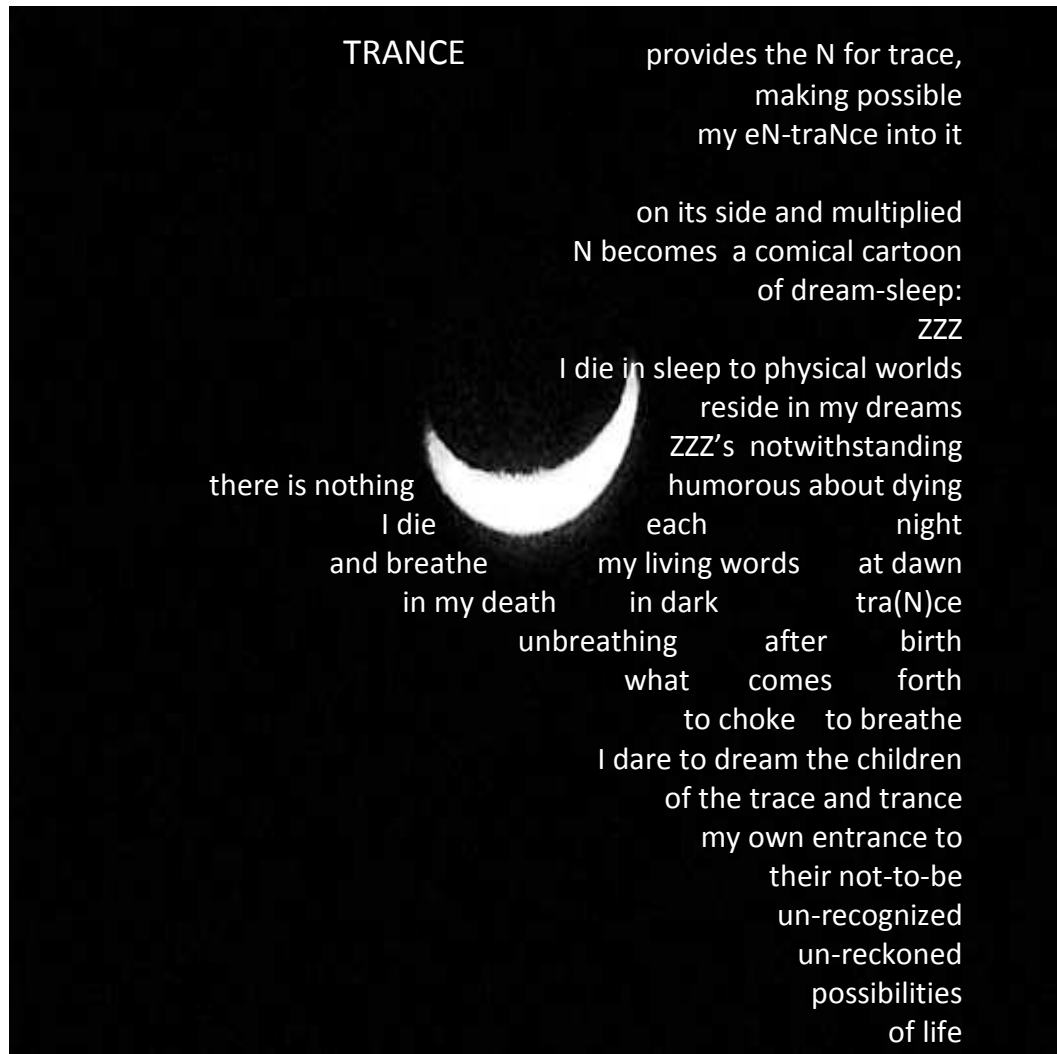


Figure 100. *Trance* (poem) *Crescent Moon: Spring*, 2009. Digital photograph

according to Derrida (1981, p. 7). The preface of my writing and art making is the dream-trance wherein I am face to face with past, present and future facets of my text and texture. It is before the not-yet-written, the unmarked face of the

page, and yet once the face is marked, it is past writing, beyond the trace: “The *pre* of the preface makes the future present, represents it, draws it closer, breathes it in, and in going ahead of it puts it ahead. The *pre* reduces the future to the form of manifest presence” (Derrida, 1981, p.7). Of course, as Derrida (1981) observed, writing itself does not situate itself in tenses. That which is the trace through the trance, particularly when it pre-writes or marks my creative act, “cancels itself out. But this subtraction leaves a mark of erasure, a remainder which is added to the subsequent text” (Derrida, 1981, p. 9). The dream, for me, is experience that has been subtracted from my body written or marked as text or texture, but which leaves its trace, its eraser markings that appear in night when there is no light except reflective moon until morning. I mark the traces in the dark in the half-awake of sleep when I see nothing but dreams and feel only the journal on the table and my pen re-marking what the dreams have already marked.

### **Last Night’s Trace: April 30**

My dead grandmother came to me. I was in a pavilion of some kind. I had already exited once and found myself on ground level with the road. At that time I was with friends, students. I reentered the pavilion—I had forgotten something—and when I emerged, my grandmother was there at the side of the road, looking for me. She saw me, smiled, and entered the pavilion. I went to look for her car. I went to the edge of the road and saw instead a small hill. Looking down, I gasped, for the hill was a rock precipice, and the car was about fifty feet below. I



noticed a steep stairway to the left and realized my grandmother must have parked the car below and climbed the narrow stairs on her own.

My mother used to tell me stories of when, as a child before Hitler, she lived on a steep hill. Behind her house, the hill rose again, covered with my grandmother's rock gardens, and met the houses on the next hilly street over. In front of their house, across the street, another hill led down to a river. I remember my grandmother (in dream traces that re-birth my



Figure 101. *Grandmother-of-the-Castle*, 2009  
Digital photograph

mother's stories) climbing the narrow steps leading up the steep hill to her house. I remember that my grandmother never learned how to drive. Her house seemed to me to be a castle in that Other country; my people who entered its borders spoke Yiddish and Other tongues. The guttural words rolled off Grandmother-of-the-Castle's tongue. I caught them like pearls and painted with their pearl-essence.

Only the traces that I catch (that is, the dreams of events or persons or words from another time) can remark their disappearing forms on my art. I am not always quick enough in the middle of the night; I dream them alive one moment and they die again the next. Those that make it to a mark on paper or

canvas sleep with me for the rest of the night, between the dream sheets and the dawn, like children yearning for their mother's touch. I will not let them go. Then again, perhaps it is they who will not let me go. They transform the gauze-eyes of the dream; they transform my gaze.

#### **Transforming the Gaze in Class: May 4**

My belly has transformed itself into a fully useable table now. Breakfast in bed on belly is possible. My students remark on my transformation. Some reach out to try to feel the moving kicks and turns that manifest themselves as bulges and bumps against my now noticeably tight tunics. They experience my pregnant transformation through touch and gaze. How do I ask them to transform themselves? Their gazes that are too common, too normal, too expected?

I revisit Alison Saar's art. My students remember her hanging woman, *Strange Fruit*, and told me that they began to see the world through Saar. They look at the new piece I show them, Saar's 2001 piece *Lave Tete* ([http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/a/african\\_american\\_8.html](http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/a/african_american_8.html)), through the same gaze. I say: *Describe what you see.*

- She's piled kettles on the back of a woman.
- They look like they're holding together in some crazy way, **and** ready to fall.

*Simultaneous orderliness and precariousness. What else?*

- The kettles are white, or silver.
- The woman is copper—like all the roofs on campus.
- Aged copper. . .kind of mottled green.
- So is she white or black?
- She's green!
- She's washing her hair with all those kettles on top of her. She can't even get to them.

- Her hand's on her back, though. Maybe she's washing her whole body.

*How do you begin to interpret this piece by Saar?*

- I'm wondering if she has to wash for other people. She's carrying this heavy load and it's not even her own. Or for herself.
- Maybe the load represents her own burdens. Maybe she has to wash away the dirt of a rape, or some other kind of attack. It would take a lot of water, and the water would be hard to reach. She'd have a difficult time getting it to her body.
- Maybe it's just painful memories that she wants to wash off of her body.
- It's gotta be something like that, because all the work we've seen of Saar's is about oppression and what it means to be black in a dominant white world.

Interestingly, my students are transferring previous knowledge of Saar's work to this present one. It is directly opposite of Morris' request that we not transfer happy endings from other stories to that of the Holocaust. Here, students are transferring the oppressed story of *Strange Fruit* to *Lave Tete*.

*Doesn't an artist have the freedom to change directions? To address other issues besides the one they may begin with, or art about most frequently?*

- Well, yeah, otherwise they wouldn't grow.
- An artist has to keep up with cultural and governmental changes like anyone else.

*Saar says this piece, Lave Tete, which means "Washing the Head," situates the woman within Yoruban culture. She's performing a head washing ceremony, a ritual of purification and spiritual cleansing. How does knowing this change your interpretation?*

- Instead of being bent over in oppression, maybe she's bent over in humility and gratefulness.
- Or because she's washing her hair!! (*Laughter*)
- So why are the kettles stacked on her back?

*She tells us that in their reaching towards the heavens, they represent patience, compassion and the immense power of love.*

- Like vessels collecting rain water.
- That's a change in her artistic intentions!
- It's like she's transformed herself in front of our eyes.
- She was all about addressing dominations and injustices of society before.

*And here she focuses on an alternate image of a society in which the elements of a ritual portray spirituality and morality. She requires you to experience a paradigm shift. She wants us all to be witnesses to holy elements in Yoruban culture, of which love is one.*

- *Mirroring Evil* did the same thing. It took all those Nazi images that were fixed in our minds and made us reexamine them.
- Made us play with them! Remember how many of the pieces were presented as children's toys?
- Deadly children's toys!

*Indeed!*

I thank them for their interrogation and their juxtaposition of a reexamination of Saar's art to that of many others in the *Mirroring Evil* show ([http://www.jewishmuseum.org/home/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring\\_evil/mirroring.html](http://www.jewishmuseum.org/home/content/exhibitions/special/mirroring_evil/mirroring.html)). I bring up Derrida and the deconstruction of language and suggest that th



Figure 102. *Gaze Graze Raze*

Contemporary art welcomes defamiliari:  
contemporary art creates the space to discuss hot topics with my students as it educates them to view the familiar with unfamiliar eyes. By seeing the power of the images to sometimes mirror and at other times to prophesy about or against their world, there is the potential for their gaze to be transformed.

It is the “ah-ha!” moment: art removes scales from the gaze of their eyes; their gaze is grazed by the image—the image “roughen[s] or abrade[s] (the skin or a part of the body) in rubbing or brushing past” (<http://dictionary.oed.com>); the first gaze is now razed (scraped away), and my students (and I) can imagine, create, and enact a praxis for transforming the world.



Figure 103. *Appearance of Normality*, 2008.  
Digital photograph with markings

I wonder what might happen if they gaze towards Gaza with newly razed eyes. Will a new consciousness be raised for the sake of creating shalom between brother and sister?)

### **When Birth is Complicated by the Wor(l)d: May 5**

I have often exposed my poetic or theoretical *word* to the dangerous *world*; I have “set it out” (Latin, *expositus*), without its blanket. This writing is made up of words I am not sure I want to claim as my own once I have written them. This strange, unfamiliar thing! I am ashamed of its brazenness, its

glistening embodied form. It reminds me of the glassy blue eyes of my dream collector-of-the-dead-me. I urge this writing to crawl away, to retreat to the dark warm place where it still ties itself, umbilical-corded, to mother/father me. Quick! Before others see and reckon it one of Plato's orphan-words! Others need not read this word, cannot read it—its gleaming is too harsh on the eyes, on the heart. This writing, says the other-I, is too critical of the place into which it is born. It is a premature beast; abandon it to a wild place, a wilderness, a wide expanse of exposure without protector, or perhaps to the biblical *azazel*/ spirit in Leviticus 16 who waits to devour all (goats or humans) that are given up to the wild.

premature birth

hastens out  
expecting  
great things  
not  
a slap  
upon arrival  
painful slap!  
stinging flesh of page  
singes  
leaves its mark  
imprint  
gash  
cut  
brings blood  
I want to  
force the  
slapped mark  
back  
into womb  
(or at least birth canal)  
this is  
risky writing

crying out  
in stark cold light—  
before its time—  
with no one  
there  
not even the  
writer-I  
to  
embrace it

The *azazel* text describes the Yom Kippur ritual marking of two goats. One is sacrificed by Aaron the high priest as a sin offering while the other takes on the iniquities of all the people in the community and is released to the wilderness for Azazel, a desert spirit or demon of sorts in earliest texts that later referred to the name of a specific high cliff from which the scapegoat was hurled.

The scapegoat for the sins of all my writing. I feel it keenly. I double up in



Figure 104. *Reading the Future*, 2009. Digital photograph

pain and horror with this  
possible death upon the  
birth of a less than  
perfectly formed child. My  
grandmother's specter  
returns to walk within my  
writing. My own, too, as  
dream-death, zips itself  
into the horror. I cannot  
write this text, this test of

my endurance, this testimony of the death of text.

This deadly reception is not what the text expected. Conception promised more—a loving world with eyes peeled to read. I never anticipated rejection or doubt. My text is “stigmatexted”—Cixous’ (1998) word coinage of a text that pierces and cuts, draws blood as stigmata: “Stigmatexts [are] caused by a blow, they are the transfiguration of a spilling of blood, be it real or translated into a haemorrhage of the soul” (Cixous, 1998, p. xi). “Each Stigmatext is the portrait of a story attacked from all sides, that attacks itself and in the end, gets away” (Cixous, 1998, p. xvi). Or:

All literature is scary. It celebrates the wound and repeats the lesion . . . scar adds something: a visible or invisible fibrous tissue that really or allegorically replaces a loss of substance which is therefore not lost but added to, augmentation of memory by a small mnesic growth. Unlike scar, stigmata takes away, removes substance, carves out a place for itself. Stigmata are traces of a sting. (Cixous, 1998, pp. xii-xiii)

Cixous “cultivates” stigmata as they stimulate her to write. She cultivates her wounds into words. But stigma is not all pain, piercing and trauma! She finds in the plant world a stigma that fertilizes and germinates. This is the image I choose to use as I theorize my writing and marking as a Second Generation daughter:

Stigma is the part of the pistil, the female parts of the flower, where the male pollen germinates. The stigma is a little magic uterus. In the cavity resurrection is hatched. What is dead and what will live share the same bed. Tomb-cradle: another definition of Stigma. (Cixous, 1998, p. xiv)



Magic uterus and tomb-cradle. Is there resurrection after death? A biblical prophet (Ezekiel 27:1-14) writes of a great graveyard filled with bones that come to life—understood by some theologians or interpreters of text as the State of Israel or the reentry into life of survivors after the Shoah. But how can the *dead* of the Shoah be stigmatized to life again through post-Holocaust art and writing? Can I mark them alive?

How do dead ghosts present themselves to my living students, the ones who will carry the word? Soon my parents will be gone, as will their still-living friends. And all that will remain of them are their stories, their words, their hesitating gestures, pauses, and intakes of breath captured on film. And their creative art—their children and their children's children. Those who are born one hundred years after liberation—what will their interpretations be of the Shoah? How can what I do now with my students effect how their children and grandchildren will see the Event?

I balk against the catch-phrase buttons and the all-too-easy assignment of Frank's *The Diary of Anne Frank* or

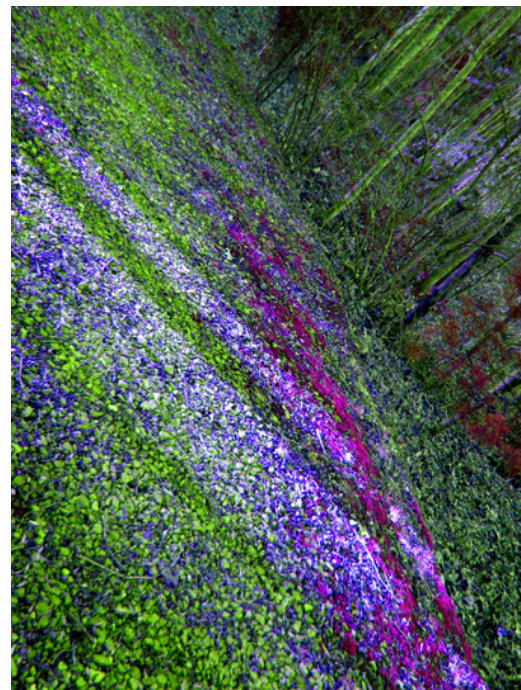


Figure 105. *Another Forest*, 2009  
Digital Photograph

Wiesel's *Night*—both moving tributes to the lives lost and liberated—**without** investigation into other narratives, other theologies and philosophies. The words of two gifted people cannot speak for each one of the millions. Each one, living and dead, has a story personal to him or herself. I want the educational road to branch off the worn and familiar track to multivalent ways through the forest of discovery. I will guard against the immature and insubstantial nod of some teachers that reduces the complexities of the camps to a few paragraphs in history books or the selection of a chosen few writers.

### Premature Birth: May 6



Figure 106. Poem and *In Hiding: Savannah*, 2008. Digital photograph

One of the women in my birthing group went into labor six weeks early and gave birth to a healthy but nevertheless premature son. I fear pre-maturity on

all levels: birthing my self, my daughter, and my texts/textures. Yet I can only theorize about the marking of poetry or art:

Cixous (1998) exclaimed:

I want stigmata. I do not want the stigmata to disappear. I am attached to my engravings, to the stings in my flesh and my mental parchment. I do not fear that trauma and stigma will form an alliance: The literature in me wants to maintain and reanimate traces. Traumatism as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of a text. (p. xiv)

Beasts though they are, these premature words survive. I allow them the breast. They are not sent to their deaths to Azazel in the wild places on the other side of the margins, the place of disappearance. Instead, they etch themselves like veins into their mother. I bear the bloody marks of their life as they attach their hungry mouths and root on me. Sometimes the experience pushes me towards the rocky cliff called Azazel towards a descent into madness.

Madness, like *eros*, is one of those tricky words; perhaps it is best to let it be ambiguous. Catholic religious Julian of Norwich, wrote (1342-c.1416) about a religious experience in which stigmata appeared and disappeared on her palms. She was convinced the marks were a result of her own “ravings,” but later, she wrote that she was “told” by “our Lord”: “Know it well, it was no hallucination which you saw today, but accept and believe it and hold firmly to it, and you will not be overcome” (Norwich, 1978, p. 165). Were her stigmata experientially “real”? And what does “real” mean when one talks about blood pouring from holes in one’s hands? What does “real” mean when we are commanded to

remember the screams of children thrown alive into fiery furnaces? What kind of madness is this?

I ask myself the same when I write poetry or make art that pours from my hands to the page as blood from open wounds. But / only experience “real” blood when I clutch a pen or brush too tightly, too long, and a “wound” forms and opens. My fire is the flame of imagination. A different kind of signifier. Yet similar.

When I am driven to make marks in an artistic fashion by thoughts or by some dybbuk memory that speaks with the voice of a past injustice—my parents’ Holocaust, my own pain or that which I inflicted on others—it possesses me, clings to me until I write. I show the scars of its grip in my body. Only when my fingers pick up the pen or brush to traumatize the page with stigmata am I partially released from the malevolence. In writing its words, I germinate it benevolently. I plant it firmly on the stage of the page. From trauma to drama.

Tony Kushner (1998) adapted the classic Jewish dybbuk story by S. Ansky (1920, 2002) for the theatre. Kushner’s *Dybbuk* addresses issues of how



Figure 107. *Soul of the Wood: Savannah*, 2008  
Digital photograph

the dead communicate with the living, how the trauma of death affects the psychological state of the left-living. The astounding aspect of the show in terms of theorizing post-Holocaust art is how easily the dead inhabit the bodies of the living, how seductively they speak through living voices. I know this seduction. I have heard my grandmother speak through me; she has marked her words in my flesh to make them live. They suckle my breast. Will they steal milk from my daughter?

### **The Authority of the Ad: May 7**

We talked today in class about the way corporations also speak seductively through consumer ads manipulated as subtle suggestions. Their tactics are the very ones used by Nazi filmmakers to convince Germans of the value of the Third Reich. Films such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1934) and Fritz Hippler's *The Eternal Jew* (1940) were carefully crafted both artistically and psychologically for the promotion of Nazism and the demotion of the Jews and other "enemies" of the Reich. For example, the opening segment of *Triumph of the Will* is shot from Hitler's plane; the camera shows a sweeping panoramic of the clouds, then focuses on the waiting crowd below. Hitler is thus depicted as a messianic figure descending from the heavens, not to chaos, but to extreme order: lines and lines of carefully placed soldiers and civilians awaiting the word from Him.

"I don't know how they were duped so easily," remarked a student, beginning the discussion:

- Who? The people waiting for him or the people watching the film?
- Both, but really, the people watching the film. That they thought he was their messiah.
- He thought he was God.

*If he wanted the film to be made, but gave the filmmaker artistic license, then what does the film tell us?*

- That she was a Nazi too?
- Not necessarily. The subject matter is the Nazi Party Congress in 1933. It's a film about history. The director just made certain artistic choices.
- The choice to place Hitler in the role of messiah?
- The German people had already put him there.
- What would have happened to her if she didn't film it? Blackballed, or imprisoned?

*Let's get back to the underlying message of the film.*

- It kinda seems to be alluring viewers into the goodness of Hitler. It pictures him as being above their humanity—they look up to him as a powerful figure who will lead them into some wonderful future.
- Yeah, without Jews.
- You don't really get that so much from the film. It's more about the crowds and the man. I think that's reading too much into it.
- But the way the camera moves, the way the music sounds at certain places—like a folk song, then changing to victory marches—they are all devices that are used to influence the people's mind.
- Like brainwashing. Like they were saying to see all the good, all the order, all the sermonizing hype, so they could buy into the politics and disregard common sense.
- And their Jewish neighbors.

*Do we have anything now that brainwashes us?*

- All the documentaries after 9/11 did the same thing. Made us want to make our country safe from terrorists.
- Made some people want to join the army.
- Yeah, to go out and kill terrorists.
- Everything that's on TV now does it. Everything has its own perspective and makes us want to buy into it. Movies too. Same thing. Like Michael Moore's films.
- How about commercials? They really brainwash us into buying stuff we don't need to be the kind of people we will never be.
- And we do what they tell us. How stupid is that!

This led into an extended interrogation of the way companies use media in the visual and aural forms of hypnotic voice and seductive image to sell us anything they wish us to buy, from toothpaste to colleges. We even talked about how some colors, angles, sounds, voices, actors and places are more seductive and hypnotic than others; I showed them images from design books that attest to the visual tactics of the advertisers. I introduced them to Steinberg and Kincheloe's theorizing on postmodern childhood.

Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe (1997) probed the dynamics of postmodern childhood as a social construction--a kinderculture-- "that is subject to change whenever major social transformations take place" (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, p. 2). Current themes are "childhood lost," "children growing up too fast," and "child terror in the isolation of the fragmented home and community" (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, p. 3). Kincheloe and Steinberg analyzed how children are affected by the corporate production of popular kinderculture—cultural pedagogy— which has augmented and even sometimes replaced traditional pedagogy with its own commercial goals that prey upon and entice children's desires. For children, the Authority is the power the corporations yield in shaping their lives through seductive "teaching" paraphernalia: toys, movies, Happy Meals, horror books—all peddled through the saturation techniques of electronic media.

The children bow in obedience to what they are sold—that they themselves now have the power and the knowledge over. What takes place is a

subtle subversion of “children’s consciousnesses of themselves as incompetent and dependent” to a new, wiser view of themselves as equally knowing and responsible as adults. Most of their parents and teachers are clueless to the change. Postmodern children indeed think themselves capable of being like the Kevin McAlister, the child hero in Chris Columbus’ *Home Alone* (1990) as they defy concealed hurt and pain that they feel as members of families who are “physically together but culturally and emotionally fragmented,” Kincheloe’s (1997) critique of Kevin’s ordeal in the blockbuster movie.

I also mentioned Sut Jhally’s films that study advertising and the selling of sexual behavior through music videos (for two examples, see Jhally’s *Advertising and the End of the World* (1997) [http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action &key =101](http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=101) and *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Videos* (2008) [http://www. mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action &key=223](http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=223)). Jhally uses images with which students are all too familiar and smacks them in the face with the underlying meaning and intent of the advertising and music industry.

How do I even begin to instruct my students of the inherent dangers in accepting as harmless everything they see on television? Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) challenged parents, educators and others to begin to interpret children not by means of biological, Piaget-ordered formulations, but by contemporary culture through which the powers of the corporate world affect (infect?) children’s learning in cultural ways (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, pp. 2-



6). Likewise, they suggested that studies must address the cultural and social conditions impacting family life that lead to children's sense of loneliness and abandonment (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, p. 32). Children must be welcomed back from the margins of society, where they have been relegated by adults who fear them and deem them out-of-control or even monstrous, into functional relationships with family members and teachers who must take responsibility for them, lest the children dissolve in the kinderculture to which they have withdrawn (Steinberg and Kinchloe, p. 36).

Kincheloe also challenged those in right-wing politics to refrain from blaming feminism for the disintegration of "family values," and instead expand their field of vision to see that economic decline (from 1973 on) due to corporate Power that elevates the wealthy few, reduces the middle class, and increases those in poverty must be blamed for the inability of contemporary society to live up to "traditional" models. Steinberg and Kincheloe urged those who care for and about children to ask "questions of race-, class-, and gender-related injustices that plague segments of kinderculture's child audiences and shape the format of the media, print, and interactive dimensions of kinderculture" (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, p. 23). They suggested that educational programs must acknowledge and be unafraid of childhood desire and knowledge, and must seek to discover, with Paulo Freire, the intuitions and wisdoms children "bring to school" (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997, p. 27).

My observation: My high school students bring to school years of watching music videos and giving in the demands of blatant advertising. Can education change the influences that are already folded on the insides of their bodies and psyches? Can art address the problem in a valuable, transformative way? Certainly Jhally's films are a beginning.

### **Shifting towards Birth: May 9**

My daughter shifted today. I felt her begin to position herself for the descent. Not the complete turn, but on the spiraling path. I am ecstatic and fearful with the impending birth. I find my thoughts are only on her, my doula, and my physician-midwife. I have been told that I will be in control during the birth. What I say goes. I will be my own midwife there as I am



Figure 108. *Shifting Positions*, 2009. Digital photograph

in my writing and art making. I pray only that in the activity of birth, I will know what to say, and that my body will allow me to speak.

### **The Politics of Women's Blood and Markings: May 11**

The midwife-mother artist/writer politicizes her role. She supplants the physician who wants it done now, his way, so he can move to the next body, the

next birth. He acts with precise, ordered, quick linear snips with sharp knives and metallic clicking instruments, his gloved hands manipulating the metals to stirrup, stretch, cut (deeper cuts than those by which I cut myself when necessary). He thumps, prods, and takes by force that which needs only time and space to be born. There is regimented order in his actions. A watch-ful “by the book.” The formulaic birth. He provides little more than his sharpened, gleaming, marking instruments. His actions satisfy himself alone.

The midwife concerns herself with pro-vision: she provides her own hands; she cites potential causes for alarm; she eyes herself with sight that equals a cat's in the darkness. She is pro-active; that is, a pro at political activity. Druscilla Cornell in *At the Heart of Freedom*, created an “imaginary domain. . .that [is] psychic and moral space in which we, as sexed creatures who care deeply about matters of the heart, are allowed to evaluate and represent who we are” (cited by Barbara S. Andrews, 2001, 126). I imagine the representation of the moral-I on a page as visions drawn with language that can be introduced outward, to others beyond my imaginary domain. But I grow them in the space of the womb, as story, play, or poem. Charlotte Delbo (1995), French Holocaust survivor, brought forth her memories in word in her prose, poetry, and in a play (1983), *Who Will Carry the Word?*, allowing me to remember her still-living dead fellow prisoners. As midwife, I pull forth my writing, photography, and art. As mother, I carry the child forward. She is a politicized bundle, crying out its warning against genocidal acts of governments, Hitler's and all who preceded

and followed him. It is embodied in play. In dialogue. In action. I clutch the newborn expression close, want her to recognize the one who gave her birth.

**Shifra and Puah: May 12**

Perhaps it is because Passover was just last month, but the image of midwife-mother conjures up textual memories, read aloud every year at the Passover Seder, of Shifra and Puah, two ancient women midwives in the beginning of Exodus (or should I rename the book Entrance?) who defied a male ruler's order to kill all newborn Hebrew sons by drowning; who risked their own lives for the sake of the not-women-newborns and their mothers because life is precious and not to be destroyed to satisfy the fears of a jealous Pharaoh.

In many cultures and birthing spaces, the midwife delivers what others refuse to have anything to do with. A woman giving birth, her blood and afterbirth are separated from some communities, as is a female child. Both are de-posed (un-suggested; that is, to de-compose to invisibility, to death) on the outskirts of the town. If a living child is born, it is placed, along with the birthing mother, in a special tent, hut, woods, so that the "impurity" of the act and the sex can neither be seen nor allowed to "touch" others. The midwife/mother/writer-I refutes the de-positing, the de-composing, the marginalizing, the out-skirting, the silent death. The midwife/mother-I, bearing words and thus baring soul, act as a catalyst for transformation, wisdom and life. M/other contains other in her body. They share blood roots.

### **Chains of Meaning and Memories: May 13**

To give birth to the blood and waters of words as woman's writing is potency itself. There is life in my words written on the page that connect as multiple chains of etymologies, as pearls of word-genes generation to generation (Hebrew: *l'dor va-dor*). I take my writing back through a *dor* (generation) which acts as a door to the past: generations of languages and meanings to a far distance "present" that now, in this present, opens wide to gift me with what I sometimes receive or perceive as incomprehensible *glossalalia*, but which, after feeding and fawning, emerges as meaningful words with extraordinary connections. The Hebrew word for "chain" is *shelshellet*, when it is sung, it sounds like spiraling notes up and down the scale, wavering, troubling the meaning (and the possibilities of action) of the word over which the trope mark is placed. It is an ancient/rabbinic/post-modern act of queering the text, of linking one word to many interpretations. Making the familiar strange and the strange familiar.

### **Birth in a Post-Modern World: May 14**

Into what strange and familiar world will I deliver my daughter? Certainly I fear the continuing wars and genocides, the still-patriarchal dominance that exists in many areas (including advertising and music videos). What does it mean to birth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

To bring a child into our 21<sup>st</sup> century world is to birth her into an already existent global culture. "Child" signifies both my daughter and my art

making/writing. However, I write now about the latter since the former has not yet arrived. Rather than assuming, as does Plato, that one's (holy?) words might be orphaned, abused, changed or raped in some vicious, violent way, I prefer to mark my children into the chain of questioning, open-ended dialogues with artists, writers, thinkers and speakers alike—a dialogical chain that doesn't presuppose an unchanging Truth, and that trusts that what is already marked is far more benevolent than malevolent, while still acknowledging possibilities of oppression. It is a desire for *tikkun olam*, the healing of the world, through words, acts, and experience, which is primary.

Arendt: "If we lose the ground of experience, then we get into all

kinds of theories" (cited by Eleanor Honig Skoller, 1993, p. 84).

The ground of experience is right in before my eyes. I touch, taste, and feel it; I make love to it, feed it, give birth to it, bury it. Yet it is not only experience's ground that is important to my life, but what is under ground—the roots that transport others' experiences into our own as we inherit their



Figure 109. Benevolent Mother. 2009.  
Digital photograph

memories. What is “true” is not universal Truth, no matter how loud one cries in the wilderness or on the mountain or while walking on water. Everyone who hears, sees or reads brings his or her own senses and experiences to the event, and each goes away with a different version of a truth, as the storied events in the Synoptic Gospels or the multiple interpretations of rabbinic discourse indicate. Are our lives anything but partly fiction, partly truth?

What, then, are the changing truths of my marking? It is the birthings from my ongoing life and experiences that cling both to mother-wisdom of the past, and to the moment-to-moment breathing of the present. My writing, constructed from what I have heard, read, been told or taught, lives and breathes in my penetrated womb underground. I have gone to the roots, as Helene said all writers must do. At some point, in that site, a division of lives, as Cixous (1991) wrote:

*What I was, if that could be described, was a whirlwind of tensions, a series of fires, then thousand scenes of violence (history had nourished me on this: I had the “luck” to take my first steps in the blazing hotbed between two holocausts, in the midst, in the very bosom of racism, to be three years old in 1940, to be Jewish, one part of me in the concentration camps, one part of me in the “colonies.”) So all my lives are divided between two principal lives, my life up above and my life down below. Down below I claw, I am lacerated, I sob. Up above I pleasure. Down below, carnage, limbs, quarterings, tortured bodies, noises, engines, harrow. Up above, face, mouth, aura; torrent of the silence of the heart. (Cixous, 1991, p. 17)*

Somehow, despite existing and remembering “above” and “below,” my markings must give voice to the silence of the heart through the womb of words

and images in order to allow the lives of my selves to merge. Then I can begin to make meaning of them to heal the injustices of the world.

### **Struggling in the Womb and in the World: May 15**

The writer of Genesis told the story of Jacob and Esau, twin brothers, who struggled in their mother Rebekah's womb as the descent towards birth took place. Esau was born first, but his brother Jacob entered into life grabbing on to Esau's heel, as if to pull him backward from his forward move toward birth. The name Jacob means "supplanter," an apt name for one who would later trade a bowl of lentils for his brother's birthright, and steal his first-born blessing through trickery. The account of the twins highlights familial, theological and ethical struggles to determine which son would gain power in all three areas. How Torah recorded and rabbinic literature rewrote/interpreted the struggle is an interesting read. I pray my daughter will have no cause to fear her blessing or her birthright.

Teresa Ebert (1991) wanted to "rewrite" meaning as a "matter of social struggle" in which the sign becomes "an ideological process in which we consider a signifier in relation to a matrix of historically possible signifieds" (Ebert, 1991, p. 897). The relationship between both is never secure and is always subject to change depending on the ideology that prevails at a certain time.

Ebert warned that this struggle must not reject the idea of totality even as it locates itself in the "concrete, specific and local"; she rewrote both totality and "the struggle concept of patriarchy" to "show how differences are never free-floating, but rather . . . coalesce into social contradictions, into the 'other'



inscribed within the system” (Ebert, 1991, pp. 898-99). In doing so, she realized the contingency involved in transformative action that involves analysis of power and differences in a certain system and how they are determined by the same in other systems that create contradictions and differences within. While Ebert found questioning women’s positions in local sites of oppression helpful and necessary, she extended the discussion to the global political arena of relations of difference in order to compare and contrast women’s struggles and oppressions not only in Central Park, but also in a Pakistani village.

This is the meaning of active art making and writing for the sake of *tikkun olam* for me: marking a healing of the world that not only occurs in the site of my classroom, city, state, or nation, but transgresses the borders and the edges of my familiarity to speak for and embrace other women and men who suffer in their political own sites of silence and oppression. I include my own parents. My activity is not necessarily writing or art *about* the oppressed other, but rather marks born as activity in the site of compassion and mercy that reach a stage of indignation in their afterbirth. I mark to cry out against hegemony, xenophobia, patriarchy, homophobia that result in colonization, beatings and death, mutilations, war and genocide. This cry sounds out as a being-for the silenced, powerless ones.

I cannot help but consider the situation of those without power in demolished Gaza. From my privileged position, I see both sides of the border (Hamas’ constant barrage of missiles into Israel from Gaza in which Israelis have

fifteen seconds from warning to shelter, *and* the absolute helplessness of those barraged for over a week by Israeli forces that leveled much of Gaza to rubble). But I cannot only say “hurray for the Jews;” I cannot turn my back on those in Gaza who have lost family members—parents, grandparents, children, babies in womb—in the Israeli strikes. I do not advocate (and strongly deny) the equation by some of Israeli’s military action with Hitler’s Final Solutions, but in both Gaza and the camps, innocent people’s lives were taken or forever changed by trauma brought on by the power of others. I will not be one who stands idly by.

### **Marking for the Oppressed; Making Art for the Dead: May 16**

Richard Rorty (1989) pointed out that those who are victims of some cruel human act are often those who are suffering, and thus unable to speak about their suffering and humiliation: “That is why there is no such thing as the ‘voice of the oppressed’ or the ‘language of victims.’” (94) For those who suffer in silence, “the job of putting their situation into language is going to have to be done for them by somebody else. The liberal novelist, poet or journalist is good at that. The liberal theorist usually is not.” (95)

Barbara S. Andrew (2001) posited the need for stories of compassion when imagining and acting towards the other in ethical relationships:

Ethics of love and care provide an ideal of ethical relationship. Our own relationships will often fall short of that ideal. What I think we need are lots of stories to give us lots of ideas about who we are and what we can be. We need new myths, new ideas of the telos of the ethical woman. Perhaps we can find some of these myths by imagining ourselves to be the creators of found art and pursuers of erotic joy. (Andrew, 2001, pp. 130-31)

I birth new myths. I imagine myself a creator, a mother to others. I imagine poetically as does Cixous within her *écriture féminine*, Andrew with her telos of the ethical woman, and as does the novelist, poet or journalist that Rorty suggested above. Add visual artists to the list; all of these imaginative ones are able to give voice to sufferings of all kinds and so, at least, are able to begin to topple all



Figure 110. *Without Voice*, 2008. Digital photograph with markings



Figure 111. *Intention Toward the Other*, 2009. Digital photograph

the -isms as well as various injustices in political regimes around the world. My poet-tongue and art-marking hand join them in the struggle. I speak for the silent ones whose situations have not allowed them a voice with which to speak on their own behalf. I have not experienced what the silent ones have except through inherited memories, but I mark beyond the page of my own experience through empathy, Bauman's (1995) "being-for" the other.

My photographs *Without Voice* and *Intention Toward the Other* are both reflections on the directive to “love your neighbor,” particularly when my neighbor is someone who is unloved, or silence or hurting in ways I cannot imagine. The woman in *Without Voice* is enfolded in a garment that her mouth making speech impossible. Is she gagged? Forbidden to speak? Has her tongue been cut out? Her eyes look out—imploring someone to unwrap the shawl, to uncover her mouth. But alas, others do not “hear” the plea of the eyes. They are afraid to look, afraid to imagine what she might reveal. So the cover-up continues. Always, I imagine the site of the camps, when to be silent was necessary for life, although the silence one chose on the outside of the barbed wire was just as necessary at times and can certainly be deconstructed. I also imagine the victims of rape, incest, honor killings, injustices of all kinds. My intention is towards them. With them. For them.

*Intention Toward the Other* is an image of two legs, feet pointing in towards each other. We take our legs and feet for granted, yet they support us. Here, the two legs and feet become the figure of two people, leaning in towards each other with intentionality, with love.

If I mark on a canvas or write on a page for the voices of my ever-present dead specters, will I be faulted for creating an art or poem from my inherited, vicarious experiences? How can you silence the ones whose voices I hear in the night? How can you send away the dreams, moans, and perspectives without perceiving how they are enfolded even within my Third Generation child, who is

ready to show herself any day now? *Dor l'dor*. Generation to generation.

Inherited. Vicarious. I will tell the story when no one is left to tell. I will speak it, write it, draw it, photograph it as best I can. I will instruct my daughter to do the same. To tell the story.

**Reading Deuteronomy 34:4-8; 10-12: May 17**

Another dream. Another death. On a mountain at night. Not by the flint of Avraham *avinu* (our father), but a more peaceful death, as that of Native Americans. My body slowly disintegrates into dust, and I rise to the hardly visible evening clouds, swirling in a wind spiral, still conscious and enjoying the lightshow of stars. I should write and illustrate this. For now, connection and hermeneutics.



Figure 112. *Repose*, 2009. Digital photograph

The ancient art of storytelling is held in high esteem in most cultures. Whether a story is told around a sacred fire, or in a city classroom, it holds the

attention of the listeners. A story based on biblical text in the Jewish tradition is called a *midrash* (“a Rabbinic homiletic commentary on a text from the Hebrew Scriptures, characterized by non-literal interpretation and legendary illustration. Also: the mode of exegesis characteristic of such a commentary,” OED) for the Biblical text, filling in the gaps, explaining oddities in the text, answering questions, giving homiletic understanding.

For some reason, the story of the death of Moses has lingered close—I think my grandmother has coaxed it near. While the Torah text does not provide us with the details of the death, it does say that God buried his body and no one knew the place where it lay (Deuteronomy 34:6). Perhaps Grandmother Aliza wants me to know that wherever she is, wherever her ashes have come to rest, God knows the location.

### **Rewriting Death: May 18**

Children of survivors have “written” their own deaths in various ways. Some dreamed about death because of their parents’ stories, others were immune to it because of their parents’ stories. Some tied it to another “lesson” learned in childhood, such as that taught to Rochelle Rubenstein Kaplan by her parents:

The most terrible thing is to be selfish. To put yourself first. I equated that with being happy, so my conclusion was that I didn’t deserve to be happy even if I was expected to be. My parents always said they wanted me to be happy. They wanted me to have a good life and a peaceful life with no tragedy in it. But when I indulged myself and did something I really enjoyed, I used to think: I should be suffering . . . . And I tried . . . I wanted to suffer. Sometimes, I wanted to be dead. Death was never scary to me. Ghosts were scary, torture was scary, but not

death. Death was like a blanket, soft, like being held in someone's arms. (Cited by Epstein, 1979, p. 42)

Likewise, Helen Epstein (1979) wrote that she was never frightened by death: "Everyone in my family besides my parents had been there, in death, when I was born. It was the only place where we could hold a reunion" (Epstein, 1979, p. 42).

There is a wonderful, moving, beautifully illustrated retelling/rewriting of Moses' death on Mount in *midrashic* form through a children's book, *The Shadow of a Flying Bird*, written and illustrated by Mordecai Gerstein (1994). Gerstein based his story on the tale as recorded in *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*, by Yona Sabar, who translated it from a five-hundred-year old manuscript written in Neo-Aramaic. I find that the story offers helpful ways to approach death and to mourn, particularly for those whose bodies have no known burial site. The book is easy for children to understand (I have read it to fourth graders in a religious school setting), but sophisticated enough for adult enjoyment as well (I have likewise read the book aloud to adult students in a Torah study class).

The Torah text allows God to speak to Moses directly, but continues the story in third person; the reader is not privy to Moses' thoughts or response to God. However, in *The Shadow of a Flying Bird*, Gerstein allows characters—including angels and nature—to speak for themselves. The illustrations, evocative and breathtaking, are an integral part of the *midrash* as Gerstein spins

the Biblical text to a higher creative and interpretive level. For instance, God is illustrated as absence and presence; the clouds make a space for a Divine presence that we never see but know through the absence of other images.

The *midrash* was told in answer to inquiries about the absence of answers in the Torah text. In a simple reading of Deuteronomy 34:4-8; 10-12, thoughtful readers—including precocious children—are bound to ask questions: Did Moses accept his death with passive resignation or did he challenge God’s decision? How did Moses die? Why does the Hebrew text translation say that Moses died by the mouth of God? What were God’s feelings about the death of Moses? The Torah account, of course, doesn’t address the questions. But Gerstein’s story provides highly imaginative answers.

On another level, the book is one that can be used to address grief. The homiletic quality of *midrash*, which has been traditionally accepted by Jews as ongoing Oral Torah that was given along with the Written Torah on Mount Sinai, can help in several ways. First, the story can be a helpful tool for discussing in a sermon how one prepares for one’s own death. The story sets up stages through which Moses traveled in approaching his death:

**Stage One:** Moses questions and reasons with God—“Why now? I need more time.”

**Stage Two:** Moses prays to God in earnest—sometimes “five hundred and fifteen prayers”—in hopes of a few more years.

**Stage Three:** Moses totters beyond reason, “Let me be a fish in the sea!”—to gain more time.

**Stage Four:** Moses’ pleading and begging to the created world takes on a more militant, angry tone—an embodiment of Dylan Thomas’ (1952) poem “Do not go gentle into that good night / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

**Stage Five:** Moses is in humble resignation: “Lord of the World. . . my soul is yours. Take it.”



**Stage Six:** Moses become introspective, attending to the matters of the soul: “Moses was writing the secret names of God, and precious gems spilled from his lips and eyes; rainbows streamed from his forehead.”

**Stage Seven:** Moses’ final preparation and death—the death bed, the final breath.

Second, *The Shadow of a Flying Bird* is a tool for dealing with a mourners’ grief. In the poignant picture of God who searches for an angel willing to go to take the soul of Moses, the mourner is presented with more than a simple “it is God’s will.” The *midrash* presents Moses’ death as difficult for all—the angels refuse to be a part of it, and even God weeps as the Divine Kiss takes the soul of Moses. Grief is expected, anger is appropriate. And yet, the affirmation of the story’s end gives solace as it attests to God’s love and care even in death: “In death as in life, Moses is yours. His soul will be with your forever and always.”

Third, I cannot help but juxtapose my own knowing/unknowing of deaths during the Shoah with Moses’ experience. The contrasts of course are noticeable. The six million didn’t live to old age as did Moses; they were administered the “kiss of death” by Dr. Mengele, the “Angel of Death,” or by inhaling a canister of Zyklon B gas in a sealed gas chamber, or before that, carbon



Figure 113. *Loss and the Torn Page*, 2008  
Collage as manipulated digital photograph

monoxide through exhaust fumes from Nazi vehicles piped into the back of a trailer or other sealed room. They were not allowed to argue on their own behalf as did Moses to God. No heavenly angels intervened on their behalf for their lives to be spared. Creation did not weep even when the children burned. But I do imagine them sending up a thousand prayers as they realized their impending murders. I imagine the absent/present God taking account of their final resting places, perhaps far downstream from the many rivers into which the ashes of the dead were discarded. And I appreciate the way that Gerstein has used both text and texture through words and art to convey the story of death.

I wonder why death is so frequently on my mind today when I should be imagining birth? Grandmother Aliza, can you tell me?—you who never traveled to the place where Moses was last seen, with the Jordan River in plain sight (unless your ashes somehow miraculously made it there in some gulf stream of water or rainfall). Tell me (you can whisper silently as you always do), what do my visions mean? Why do I dream death so life-like?

### **Art and Morality: May 20**

Art as a tool for transformation in the classroom requires that I imagine the world to be a place in which the potential for peace and justice exists, in order to pick and choose from thousands of images that highlight oppression and hatred on the one hand, and hope and healing on the other. Art can weave with ease throughout disciplines and subject matters of curricula to serve as potent representations for verbal ideas being discussed, or can stand alone in the art

classroom with only my words of introduction and my students' words of critique to accompany them. I can instruct my students in the art of transformation not only as regards the making of art, but in the ongoing "becoming" of themselves and the re-making of the world. But in order not to romanticize art's place and purpose, I have to remind myself and my students that Hitler used art to glorify Germany's primal past and utopian future, and in doing so reduced German women to bodies that only gave birth to the future of the Reich, and obliterated any bodies (those "marked" as unacceptable for their imperfections) that would hinder the "vision." Art, in instances like this, brings death and destruction to those who don't fit into the romanticized notion of utopia. How do I teach my students to be critical without being dismissive or exclusive?

### **Willing Repair: May 21**

Theodor Herzl wrote about the birth of a Jewish homeland: "If you will it, it is no dream." There is vision before will. The vision is passive, however, something that comes to us in pensive moments or in dreams. We awake with the vision hovering behind our still closed eyes. It is the will to birth the dream, to put it into the realm of reality in the land of the awake and active that transcends it as mere possibility.

Judy Chicago is a major feminist visionary in the contemporary art world who has willed her visions into active art making for the sake of change. Her early works highlight the strengths of women who fought against patriarchal systems, including the art world; she finds beauty and spirituality in the folds of

the female body imaged as a flower and evidenced in the intricate folds of the vagina in *The Dinner Party* ([http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery\\_id=89](http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery_id=89)). She also devotes herself to being a prophetic voice for the powers that control us; some of the art in her *Holocaust Project* ([http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery\\_id=92](http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery_id=92)) juxtaposes scenes from the Shoah and scenes from contemporary genocides in order to show our complicities in the banality of our own evils. I showed my students her 1989 painting *Banality of Evil/Struthof* (see previous *Holocaust Project* link) and engaged them in discussion about it:

*What do you see?*

- A group of people eating. . .
- At an outdoor café.
- It has photographs of buildings and objects juxtaposed with drawn or painted people.
- There's a soldier—a Nazi, I think—sitting behind them.
- Oh my God! Look in the background! (*Gasps and other verbal reactions*)
- They're Jews, aren't they?
- Naked!
- Being whipped and herded into a gas chamber!
- It kinda looks like one is being sexually assaulted.
- And no one eating even sees it.
- You don't know.
- They are facing away from it. . .
- Maybe they turn away from the camps on purpose.
- Maybe it's too much for them to bear.
- There is an empty table and chairs to the right.
- Where the Jews, their neighbors, used to sit with them before Hitler.
- Maybe they face away from the scene in the background on purpose--maybe they're part of the machinery
- Or they don't want to come face to face with guilt about doing nothing to save the Jews.
- It's become so common place that nothing fazes them.

*Yes! Evil, for the diners, has been rendered matter-of-fact; they are no longer surprised when it blatantly shows its ugly face in their own town; they carry on with their own lives, thus becoming complicit in the deaths. So how is evil portrayed today in a way that makes it so common place that you ignore violence, abuse and injustices?*

- Well, I think the best place to start is with the music videos you made us look at.

*Keep talking.*

- All that male domination over female bodies. And we kind of take it for granted that guys are entitled to whatever they want—including sex that we don't want.
- Hey, don't blame us for wanting it. We're guys! What do you expect!

*You didn't see the movie, did you?*

- No, but I heard about it.
- Apparently you heard the wrong version.
- Bet you didn't hear about it from a girl!
- Yeah, movie videos glamorize a dominating way for men to act towards women—as just objects. Not as human beings, even.
- Sex objects. And that can lead to men *taking* what they have no right to.
- Date rape, and other kinds of assault.
- Girls can be demanding, too. It's not only the guys.

*You're correct. What else? Think of other kinds of abuses.*

- Well, how often do we pass a homeless person on the sidewalk without even looking at him or her?
- Like they have no humanity. Just because they're down on their luck.
- Or they're crazy!
- They smell.
- Yeah, and our sensitive upper middle class noses can't bear it.

*And because they smell, and they're dirty, we don't even look them in the eye? What does that say about us?*

- We're insensitive to their plight in life, I guess. We don't even consider that it could be us.
- And maybe we should, because we could be in their shoes tomorrow since the economy sucks right now.
- Maybe we've become like the way the Germans are in the painting. Like, we ignore that we know is there, but what we don't want to deal with.
- We also do it when we see gay-bashing or other kinds of stuff around school.
- We don't gay-bash!
- Are you kidding?? I hear it all the time around the dorms. Not from you all, but from some. Maybe it's not blatant, but it's around—in a subtle way.

Have they too become insensitive to gay-bashing, the hungry and homeless, or to other visual instances of injustices and suffering in their city or even in their school?

### **Rainbow Shabbats: May 21**

Judy Chicago's *Rainbow Shabbat* ([http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery\\_id=92](http://www.judychicago.com/?p=gallery&gallery_id=92)) imagines a messianic era when all humans, male and female, Arab and Israeli, Christian and Moslem, and all "others," will sit down at the same table to kindle the sacred light, to share a meal, and to study sacred texts together in a new world of peace and understanding. After the recent bombs and missiles in Gaza and Israel, this seems like a dream, or even more troubling, another utopian scheme where "chosen" individuals or peoples will be eliminated to bring about a view of someone else's perfection. But this is the vision of the prophet Zachariah, and is part of the Aleynu prayer, which is accompanied in *Sha'arei T'filah*, the Reform Jewish prayer book, by a poetic English interpretation. I read it to my class:

We pray with all our hearts: let violence be gone; let the day come soon when evil shall give way to goodness, when war shall be forgotten, hunger be no more, and all at last shall live in freedom. O Source of life: may we, created in Your image, embrace one another in friendship and in joy. Then shall we be one family . . . . (p. 150)

We looked at Chicago's *Rainbow Shabbat* again.

*We all talk about a messianic day of peace, but do you actually think it will come?*

- I do. But it won't come easily or by waiting around for someone else to bring it. We have to bring it through our own actions.

- Look at the emanations of colors coming from the yellow star. Kind of happy, isn't it?
- Isn't that what some theologians were against—turning the Holocaust into some hopeful?
- But maybe because they are all experiencing each other's suffering, they can begin to understand that they are all in need of healing.
- It's gonna take a lot of healing between Israel and Gaza, I think.
- Yeah, but there are some on both sides of the border who are already working for peace and understanding.
- We can desire peace all we want, but who's really ready to say we have many ways of finding it? I mean, a lot of nations enforce peace on their citizens through laws and restrictions.
- Or by getting rid of the ones who don't fit in to the plan.
- Through violence—
- Or concentration camps.

*This is why some people object to Chicago's Holocaust show. She tries to bring hope from the ashes.*

- So where's the happy medium?
- Happy? We're talking about the Holocaust! I don't think you can use happy in this conversation.
- Peace is not necessarily happiness, is it? I mean, peace takes a lot of hard work. It's give and take. The medium might be there, but I think it's a medium of understanding. Or trying to understand.
- Not just tolerance
- That's right. It's a medium of acceptance that I have my ways and you have your ways.
- Yeah, good luck with that in the Middle East.
- We may think it impossible, but does that mean we have to stop trying? I mean, as long as we aren't forcing someone to accept our views of how to attain it as the only way?

*Do you see how even our conversation today has moved from place to place with multiple viewpoints and stances? And we are used to this way of discussing issues. But there are so many people without a common ground except for their humanity.*

- So there won't be a happy ending? No messianic age?
- Look who you're saying that in front of! So many of us lost relatives in the Holocaust. A whole way of life wiped out.
- Except for memories.

*Except for memories. Yes. I think we should leave the question of a messianic age for more discussion. So think about it. Look up some texts. We'll revisit it.*

This is it, I thought. They are really trying to get it. They don't negate the suffering of those in the Holocaust, but neither do they negate the idea of the transformation old notions and hatreds.

There is no place at the table-to-come for oppression, hatred, sexism, racism, violence or any other injustice that keeps the human family from achieving peace. And it is a matter of justice, not happiness. My students are attempting to imagine and act in ways that will transformation, not as utopian perfection, but as living, breathing acknowledgment of the other by attempting to fix what is wrong in the present.



Figure 114. *Out of Hiding?* 2008.  
Oil on canvas

I too attempt to find some peace in my own mind, my inherited memories. It always seems to be covered, in hiding.

### **Towards Birthing: May 24**

One day to go according to the predicted day. One day. One day can mean a lifetime when one is waiting. For birth. For freedom. For the next soup and hard-crust bread. Waiting is incubation of action. Right now, I wait for the womb to act. And so I write.

Is it too much to ask students to birth their art and writing from the womb? Or to think about personal experiences that bare their thoughts, beget images



from them as children-art, and bear them on the page? How do I begin to speak of enwombed creative experiences with high school students when none of them (that I know of at my particular private Jewish boarding school) have given birth,



Figure 115. *Body Mold*, 2008.  
Digital photograph

and most have not even had sexual intercourse? What can an erotic (that is, passionate) creative arts practice be to them? How can they conceive of birthing from the body, or the womb, in their lived experience?

As I think about this, and act to birth the thoughts to page, I assume that birthing art might not be impossible for students to imagine.

Most of them are experimenting with various forms of sexual expression,

and they have had the mandatory “sex-talks” in health or biology. They know, intellectually at least, the parts of the body that have the creative juices. They know all the acts (if not the feelings) that lead to conception and growth in the womb. They don’t have to have to beget or birth a child of their own to know how babies are made. And they *know* the womb intimately in another experiential way—they were all, from their own beginnings, there inside the bodies of their mothers. Likewise, they know the womb in their Jewish studies. If I equate the

womb with the idea of *rachamim*—"mercy," "compassion,"—the womb becomes the site not only of writing and art, but that from which is formed the activity of creating to alleviate the oppressions of the world in which we live.

I further explore and juxtapose the word *rechem* with the words "womb," "uterus," and "matrix". Matrix has roots in the Latin, *mater*, "mother," in whose body there is an environment that hosts and assists in developing and populating a whole world of human children or artistic markings and writings. It is a site I think of as compassionate, from which compassionate children, words and images are born. My students are both child and image (born/created *b'tzelem Elohim*: the image of God, according to Genesis 1:27); their acts and their thoughts are capable of writing compassionated letters to government officials for the sake of change in the world. They are likewise capable of making art in which *tikkun olam* is highlighted for the sake of bettering and caring for society. They are the mothers, the midwives and the children of their own ideas birthed to page or canvas.



Figure 116. *Acts of the Granddaughters*, 2009.  
Digital photograph

How do I unfold the birth of a phenomenology of writing and art making in a high school Holocaust Imagery curriculum? I ask students to observe themselves in the act of marking text or texture and to imagine themselves in an out-of-body experience in which they see what their body does when beginning to mark. They will view the performative body, the body that acts and puts on a show for them so they are able to experience through distanced sight the nuanced physicality of writing and art making with the body. Just as Judith Butler (1990) sought to disrupt a naturalized, normalized performativity within heteronormative identities so that there is a constant flow of possible gender identities, the high school student who views her own body from a distant will disrupt her preconceived notions of how her body engages in art and text making. The seeing body disengaged from the acting body allows for a playful performance, a playing with one's self. I hope that the students will see how the actions of their marking bodies are contingent upon time, place, space, assignment, etc. If one student happens to discover deeper contingencies early, let the observations be birthed.

**B-Day: May 25**

Contractions in the early hours. I just left a message at school that I am "in active stages of birthing" and requested my stand-by sub for the final two weeks of school. The doula is on her way to my house. I have called my parents to let them know they will soon be grandparents! Uri is drawing a bath for me to soothe the contractions and to calm my anxious mind. What I haven't told anyone



Figure 117. *Within / Without*, 2009. Digital photograph

daughter and my students, will slip into the world with water and in blood.

is that I dreamed of death again last night. I will not say it aloud. My mother's fears and my grandmother's silences keep the dream tightly covered. Regardless of a dream, what has been enfolded will unfold; my present will reach out its welcoming arms to receive my past, and the trace memories, embodied in my

## CHAPTER V

### A/R/TOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### Memory, Narrative, Art and Education without “Final Solutions” or Conclusions

What I wanted, why I yearned to be a writer was to tell stories. My parents' stories, which were mine too. Slowly, I slid open my desk drawer, pulling out a manila folder. I had printed one word on the cover. SURVIVORS. *First story. A young girl is taken from Czenstochowa to a work camp. Her parents are killed. Her brother killed. She's saved by a white scarf. Survives in the camp because her uncle shares his bread. Second story: a religious boy is taken to Auschwitz. His parents and sisters are killed. He escapes while an officer pees in the woods. His brother suffocates in a cellar of potatoes four months before liberation. And I, their daughter, live in two time frames. Normal, shared reality, everyone stops at the red light. The other zone has no temporal sense. Burnt by a dog-eared yellow star, sighn of the Jews, rising, hungry eyes, overripe crazylegs nerve. I live in the ghetto of the dead.* (Pilcer, 2002, pp. 225-26)

Why am I still awakened by mid-nightmares that are not only my own, but are merged with Aliza's and with the many specters of the past? Dreams of: people entering my house, taking my possessions off the shelf, and walking away with them (in my dreams they are always my Jewish colleagues!); frightful medical conditions and treatments in which I wake up sick to my stomach; dark holes into which I endlessly fall. I sleep apart at night from all that grounds me to my life; instead I become other or am “othered” by those in my dreams who bring me fear or consternation. Do the existent evidences of anti-Semitism, reinterpreted in the twenty-first century, further disrupt my my interrupted sleep? I too live on the edge of chaos at night as an inheritor of the memories of others. I become what Zygmunt Bauman (1995) called (referring to the Jews in Hitler's Europe, not inherited memories) a “stubborn presence” who resists “spacing, ordering and structuring,” and who does not fit into the scheme of midnight dreams. My

“‘unfitting’ become[s] a fissure in the [nightmarish] world-order through which. . .chaos is, reluctantly and depressingly, sighted” (Bauman, 1995, p. 208).

My own “presence” in my dreams attests to the bodily “absence” of those victims of the Holocaust who merge with other departed in my life: mother, grandmother, husband. In the daylight hours after the dreams, I am able to remember them not as nightmares but situated in a tottering metaphorical and metonymical balance of stories, images and belongings, all of which create a web of possible interpretations, but not final meanings. In my dreams, they touch and resemble each other in ways that create suggestive threads for piecing together an insubstantial garment of continual wonder and discovery. In my wakefulness, I connect the threads to theorize and inquire, though not in traditional ways. My dreams and subsequent thought experiments defy containment. While Helene Cixous remains my constant companion in both dreaming and waking, she is not alone, nor does any one theory attract me. Rather, my ongoing fluid dreaming is revisionary and reflective, attesting to their inability to finalize my theories and inquiries. I reimagine everything.

In a 2001 article, “Challenging Tradition: A Conversation about Reimagining the Dissertation in Rhetoric and Composition,” The Dissertation Consortium asked why doctoral students are not being encouraged “to write innovative, tradition-challenging dissertations” (441) through “a complex act of knowledge, experience, and art” (citing Said, 441). In the very act of writing, the student revises, reflects, rereads, rewrites in ways that bring about a re-search that is active and resistant to static forms, that encourages interruptions to linearity by encouraging the free-flow of ideas as experienced

and engaged in the student's thought processes. Through the dissertation research, the search for self identity becomes of paramount importance: "we experience different, sometimes 'new,' selves *and* identities" (Dissertation Consortium, 2001, p. 443).

The Cultural Foundations of Education Department at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro actively encourages students to inquire outside the box by supporting doctoral students who engage in creative, qualitative and self-reflective dissertations. Students' dissertations in Cultural Foundations in the past have dialogued with narrative, documentary, dance and other arts-based inquiries as part of their research process; professors have been and continue to be supportive of creative dissertations.

I chose to experiment with philosophical thought as I wrestled with post-Holocaust studies. The thought experiment allowed me a wide and expansive site outside the box; the philosophy allowed me to unfold strange new theories from my lived experiences and the inherited memories of others.

Philosophy is not communicative, any more than it is contemplative and reflective: it is creative and even revolutionary, by nature, in that it is ceaselessly creating new concepts. The only condition is that these should have a necessity, as well as a strangeness, and they have both to the extent they respond to real problems. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 136)

The forms of thought I used in my philosophical thought experiment attempted to play with difference, always being and becoming in ways that queered convention and normality by transgressing boundaries of years, memories and death. Deleuze (1995) posited that "thinking is always experiencing. . . not interpreting but experimenting, and what we experience, experiment with, is always actuality, what's coming into being, what's new, what's taking shape" (p. 106). My thinking and wrestling with Holocaust

memories, narratives, art and teaching took place in the presence, but was rooted in and under the historical past, and always looked towards possible future inquiries—never final, and always fluid.

My philosophical thought experiment was strengthened by its location in arts-based inquiry, A/r/tography. As artist and poet, teacher of art, philosophy, theology, theatre and playwriting, and researcher of art, the fluid and open-ended processes in A/r/tography, like Deleuze's philosophic thinking, allowed me to grapple with my own lived experience inside and outside the classroom, and to intersect it with post-Holocaust research and art. It also granted me the freedom to interrupt my mental research suppositions to explore the interstices of cognitive and emotional praxes of art making and poetry, and to weave sites of learning into the politics of the school or world.

Writing and art shared equally in questioning and working out my research and theories. Colm Toibin (2004), in penning his fictive character of Henry James, recreated the act of writing through experience tempered by imagination in the novel, *The Master*. While Toibin chose to limit the chapter designations to specific months between January 1895 and October 1899, the art of his narrative transcended the boundaries of linear time, dipping backward into past events as they were examined and made to reappear in the pages of James' novels, and skipping ahead to the only imagined future. Likewise, my middle three chapters, though presented in the linear time line of the almost daily blog, transcend time as my fictional character Aliza examines and interacts with Holocaust studies and her own memories and art.



I inherited from Helene Cixous and Toibin the exemplary use of dreams. “We should try and write as our dreams teach us; shamelessly, fearlessly, and by facing what is inside every human being – sheer violence, disgust, terror, shit, invention, poetry. Our dreams are the greatest poets” (Cixous, 1990, p. 22). The use of dreams, particularly those of the dead, as wellsprings of ideas were freely used as Toibin, through James, wrote that those who have passed on can now have their destinies controlled by the writer. Toibin/James wondered “if this had happened to other writers who came before him, if Hawthorne or George Eliot had written to make the dead come back to life, had worked all day and all night like a magician or an alchemist, defying fate and time and all the implacable elements to re-create a sacred life” (2004, p. 106). This is the task that I wanted to accomplish as dissertation-as-novel writer and educator who holds within my words the power of self and others’ (re)creation. I attempted to coax alive again the ghosts of the Holocaust to give them voice and image through Aliza’s/my writing and art.

My fictional thought experiment was based on other examples of the practice of theorizing about education in novel form such as the didactic *bildungsroman* *Émile, or On Education* (1762, 1993), by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who paved the way for such novels by other writers. The recent didactic novel by Herman Stark (2003), *A Fierce Little Tragedy: Thought Passion and Self-Formation in the Philosophy Classroom*, approached the classroom, according to a blurb on the back cover, as “a unique happening of philosophy, different than reporting theories or doing research, through which a distinctive mode of philosophical formation can occur.” The

fictional teacher not only wrestled with the idea of *eros* in Plato, but also its embodied form through his intense attraction for a young woman student.

Pauline Sameshima's (2007) autobiographical dissertation-novel, *Seeing Red: A Pedagogy of Parallax (An Epistolary Bildungsroman on Artful Scholarly Inquiry*, "shares the responsibilities of how artful research informs processes of scholarly inquiry and honours the reader's multi-perspective as integral to the research project's transformational potential" (Sameshima, 2007, p. xi). Her work claimed:

- that the sharing of stories encourages reflexive inquiries in ethical self-consciousness, enlarges paradigms of the "normative," and develops pedagogical practices of liberation and acceptance of diversity;
- that form determines possibilities for content and function thus the use of an alternate format can significantly open new spaces for inquiry; and,
- that transformational learning may be significantly deepened in pedagogical practice through the intentional development of *embodied aesthetic wholeness* and of *eros* in the dynamic space between teacher and learner. . . .with consideration to: increasing receptivity and openness to learning; fostering skills of relationality; modeling wholeness-in-process in explicit, reflexive texts; layering multiple strategies of inquiry, research experiences, and presentation, and acknowledging ecological and intuitive resonances. (Sameshima, 2007, p. xii)

Sameshima, like Stark, used the possibility of a passionate relationship between student and teacher to generate a pedagogical site for the imagining and playing out of *eros*. Stark's and Sameshima's novels informed my own goals for my dissertation-as-novel which is not merely fiction, but interprets living experimental thought and experience as fictional discourse. Sameshima's in particular allowed me further inquiry into an arts-based research project through which my creative writing and art was able to go hand-in-hand with my scholarly research writing.

In addition, early nineteenth century experimental novelists (Joyce, Stein, Woolf) showed characteristics of writing that traversed from dialogue to narrative to stream of consciousness, and in which “a radical approach to the perennial task of ‘defamiliarization’ was attempted which “deviates from the received ways of representing reality – either in narrative organization or in style, or in both—to heighten or change our perception of that reality” (Lodge, 1992, p. 105). Like them, I introduced aspects of stream of consciousness writing to my inquiry through the creation of my fictional blog about Holocaust art, research and teaching. The experimental approach allowed me not only to write and format my text and art via stream-of-consciousness, but also to question and decenter traditional meanings of form, content, and theory. In particular, when theorizing about Holocaust memory, I was prompted to wrestle with society’s negative othering of outsiders and my own idea of Other (based on Martin Buber’s I-Thou) as soul-mate.

Aliza became my Other; I was able to theorize, write and make art through her own vicarious Holocaust memories. Through her, I banished any reoccurrence in my own praxis for final solutions. Through her, I re-membered through embodied theory those whose voices deserve to be heard even when they can no longer speak themselves. I invited the memories of others, through Aliza, to inform my own memory of the Holocaust, similar to the way Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertesz (1997), in his novel *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*, wrote through the persona of a middle-aged survivor:

My totally superfluous childhood memories descend upon me once in a while. I say superfluous, for these memories have long accomplished what they had to set out to do: their insidious, secret, all-emcompassing, all-destroying, all-devouring ratwork; they

should really leave me in peace now. But to return—where to? (Kertesz, 1997, pp. 27-28).

Elliot Eisner (2006) suggested that “good arts-based research ought to generate questions worth asking and ideas worth pursuing” (Eisner, p. 17). He posited that

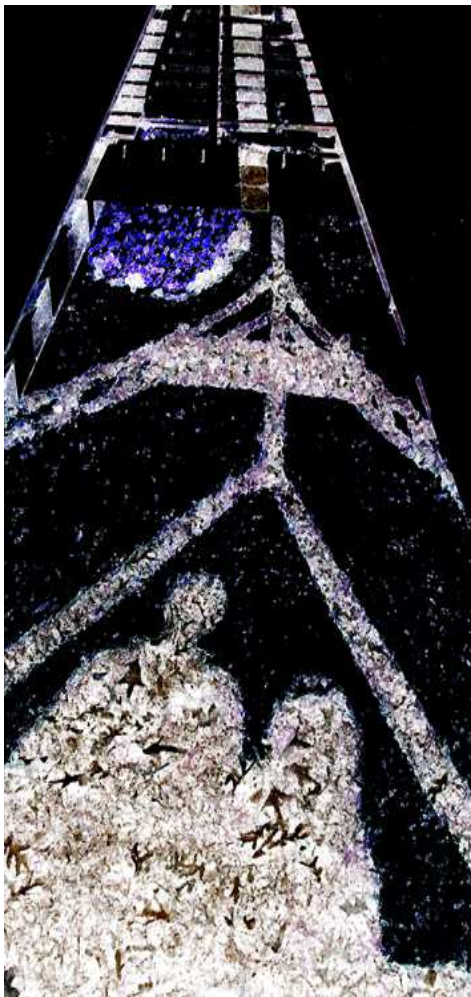


Figure 118. *End of the Line?* 2008  
Digital photograph

collective and interdisciplinary approaches be engaged to begin to answer the questions. For my inquiry, the interrogation began with one word: “Remember”—the watchword after the cataclysmic events of the Holocaust. It is incumbent on us to remember those who no longer journey upon the earth, those who cannot be re-membered bodily: those nameless ones whose flesh was burnt, whose bodies were shot and buried in mass pits, or left to freeze along a cold winter march. Remember also the heinous deeds of human against human. Remember so as not to allow the event to happen again. Never again.

And yet this is too pat, too easy. My philosophical thought experiment via novel blog and photographic, artistic inquiry, has

brought me no answers, but rather more questions. Can I even fathom what “remember”

means when I am commanded to do it after the Holocaust? What is Holocaust memory? What are its salient characteristics through the years after the event? How does it operate in the face of the deep trauma that has situated itself within the psyche of many survivors and has seeped into their children's inherited memories? How do I remember a memory that vacillates through time, moves in circular rather than linear accounts, slips in its retention of places, faces, events, horrors? How then does that small glimpse of memory operate to give insight into the past? What if my or another's memory is blocked or a psychosis is exhibited brought on through a remembrance that remains veiled and inaccessible? What if nothing can jar the recesses that are veiled? How are the un-remembered remembered?

I further toppled easy memory in the blog by asking what might occur if the memory is not that of eyewitnesses, but of their children or even grandchildren? Are their memories, gained through the stories, nightmares and even silences of their parents or grandparents, as valid as those of the eyewitness? Can their stories "carry the word," as in Charlotte Delbo's theatrical script suggests we must, or will the memory of the Holocaust cease with the eyewitnesses' deaths? What part do the memories of perpetrators or their children play in our already slippery consciousness? To complicate matters even more, is it possible for the traces of the Holocaust to be passed on, touched or re-membered by those who are not blood heirs?

How does one "member-again" any past, never mind one whose traumatic nature has made any kind of memory precarious to say the least? Can the dead be brought back to life? If so, whose memories are strong enough to do so? Whose memories count? Do

Aliza Shalem's inherited memories past the memory test? Does the meaning of this question change when we consider that Aliza is a fictive character?

And how do I consider the current generations of artists who have no familial eyewitness connections to the Holocaust but who experience a trace of the trauma through secondary but strong connections with the stories of survivors, through a study of the events, or through the icons of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century culture—can they be faithful guardians of the event? Are they too carriers of the word? What do their memories look like? What shape do they take? How do they compare with the photographs, the smuggled or hidden art from the camps, the fragile memories of those who walked out of their imprisonment or hiding? Dare I trust the “memories” of those who attempt to remember the memories of others from the separated space of years? How do I consider whether or not they are truthful, moral struggles? And what is truthful and moral in the excremental site of Auschwitz and other death camps?

Further, are memories of the Holocaust able to intertwine with memories of post-Holocaust atrocities and genocides?

Here is where I am situated, after-blog—in the interstice between event and memory, still questioning, never concluding. I am artist, reader, writer, teacher, researcher, Jew, and other multiple identities. Can I add “carrier of the word” and “rememberer” to the list? Can I re-member in some semblance of thought through my own creative writing and art those who lived and many who died before I was born—those to whom I feel a strong trace of connection that stretches like an umbilical cord backwards—and that holocaustal event that defies reason and stands still as the seminal

event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? And if I do not, how many memories will be forgotten? How many events and narratives from the camps will die like those who went in but never came out?

The Germans arrested the four young girls from Warsaw who had obtained the explosives for the insurgents. They were tortured, condemned to death, and hanged . . . . The oldest was sixteen, the youngest twelve. We can only lower our heads and be silent . . . . The lesson of the holocaust—if there is any—is that our strength is only illusory, and that in each of us is a victim who is afraid, who is cold, who is hungry. The Talmud teaches man never to judge his friend until he has been in his place. But, for the world, the Jews are not friends. They have never been. Because they had no friends they are dead. So, learn to be silent. (Wiesel, 1968, p. 197)

“Learn to be silent,” wrote Wiesel. But what was the underlying intention of his order? “Learn” signifies that we must consciously practice or study the object of one’s learning—here, the act of silence. It also implies that the human tendency is to speak, analyze, judge; Wiesel attested to this in his writing; we learn mostly through experience or study. Certainly Wiesel’s learning came through his own experience in Nazi concentration camps. But was he suggesting that one is capable of deliberately choosing not to speak of the horrors of the Holocaust? Or perhaps that one is unable to speak truthfully about them?

In my fictional blog, I suggested that one aspect of learning involves committing to memory that which one studies or experiences. “Learn to be silent.” I considered that Wiesel’s learning has to do with memory—that which is too horrible to speak of instead becomes a dreadful memory (recurring nightmare) that in turn is silenced and negated. The tongue can’t speak that for which the mind cannot find words. But, psychologists

and physiologists have discovered, the body remembers. What is silenced within is written without on the body. And the silence that one chooses to learn, particularly when one is a survivor, is passed down as a legacy to children, often in myriad forms of abuse.

Learn *to be silent*? How does the slippery, changing state of the verb “to be” impact one’s silence? Is it possible to learn *to become* silent? And what exactly did Wiesel mean by “silent?” Was he suggesting that I should learn *in order to be* silent? This is a possibility, if only to contemplate the difficulty of the task and to realize the slipperiness of the command. For Elie Wiesel himself was not silent, did not follow his own order: “. . .to remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all. . .,” he wrote. If he, who defied his own command, cannot be silent, neither should I who inherit his and so many other eyewitnesses’ memories of the Shoah.

Instead, we educators and other concerned, politically active, creative persons would do well to engage in a rather chaotic, spiraling play of paradox that slips between silence and witnessing, between presence and absence, engaging all points on the spectrum of vision. Rather than a single “site” of knowledge and understanding, or a single “site” of research, Kwon suggested a re/imagining of location to better grasp the slippery correlations between identity and location (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong and Bickel, 2006, p. 79).

Is there a time for one atrocity and another time for the other, as the author of the biblical Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) tells us? A separation of time, as conceived by the idea of a Shabbat after the work and active energy of the week—time set aside for this and time set aside for that? Yet in the separation there is an implied “other.” The other is whatever



is not occurring at that time. If silence, then no voice. If absence, no presence. If contemplation, no action. Binaries. Either-ors. Is there alternatively a time in which both may be engaged simultaneously depending on identity and location within the research? How can one simultaneously attend to the silence of contemplation and likewise break silence for social and political inequalities and atrocities?

The project of memory then becomes social and political. We can address memories of the Holocaust as we consider later atrocities. This doesn't mean that we diminish the lives of those lost in any atrocity, nor that we underestimate the enormity of Hitler's desire to exterminate Jews from the face of the earth. But we are likewise able to hold two events up side-by-side to see similarities and differences in order to learn from the memories of both.

Henry A. Giroux (2005) called for the development of a critical educational theory that serves

to provide a more critical and comprehensive basis for teachers and other educators to rethink the underlying nature of their political and ethical project . . . to understand and critically engage their roles as social activists whose work is both supported and informed by wider social movements and struggles to change the existing society." (p. 207)

Giroux urged educators to become informed of the political and cultural roles of churches and community organizations which operate as part of a "wider strategy of resistance and transformation" (Giroux, p. 208).

Giroux promoted community solidarity and a language that can articulate the politics of struggle, ethics, and experience and address suffering and oppression. He pointed out the need for teachers "to recognize youth as an oppressed social category" (p.

212) and to acknowledge the relationship between power and knowledge. Educators, then, become

bearers of dangerous memory . . . . [who] uncover and excavate those forms of historical and subjugated knowledge that point to experiences of suffering, conflict and collective struggle . . . . [in order] to link the notion of historical understanding to elements of critique and hope” (p. 213).

It is a task that calls for risk and resistance.

I carried out acts of risk and resistance through my art as it informed my blog, and through the blog itself. Art and writing became entwined in the uterus of the project, through which I was bold enough to act upon my inherited memories of Holocaust narratives and other ways I was presented histories of the Event. Art and writing were my means of witnessing. Sybil H. Milton (2001) noted that “art, whether clandestine or commissioned, served diverse functions at Theresienstadt [one of the model ghetto-camps that was usually a stopping point on the way to Auschwitz]: documentation, decoration, catharsis and survival” (in Dutlinger, ed., p. 20). Anne Dutlinger (2001) also adds the possibility of Theresienstadt art for the sake of “spiritual resistance” (p. 1), which Milton (2001) suggests is “a misconception” (p. 20). Whatever the purposes of art in Theresienstadt, within the narratives gathered from a group of survivors who were asked the question, “How did you survive?” were the words “art,” and “theatre” (Dutlinger, 2001, p. 3):

Surviving one more day to live out the next was no small achievement in Theresienstadt. But individual identity could be reclaimed—albeit it momentarily—through art. Art, music, and performance transformed fear into freedom. The act of making art suspended the collective nightmare, and replaced the arbitrary rules of the ghetto with individual purpose . . . . to sustain hope, a sense of the self, and a will to live. (Dutlinger, 2001, p. 7)

I voiced my protest of and resistance to the atrocities of the Holocaust through the persona of Aliza Shalem, and re-voiced the words of the First Generation of survivors or the narratives of their children, the Second Generation, through Aliza's artistic and educational visions and theories. I also actively sought to lift the silence with which survivors, their children and even grandchildren have been burdened so many years after liberation. I did not do so by allowing Aliza to promise her students a messianic era of peace, no matter how much they may yearn for it. Nor could I allow Aliza to believe that she was bringing a child into a world free from discord and war, oppressions and -isms. I

The subject of anti-Semitism now comes up frequently . . . . "After all we've gone through they still hate us," my mother says bitterly. "Can you imagine anything so primitive? It's something they drink in with their mother's milk." "Primitive" is a much more damning word than "immoral" or "evil." Primitive means "Vulgar, unenlightened"—something nobody would want to be. Anti-Semitism is a darkness of the mind, a prejudice—rather than a deviation from moral principle . . . . My father comes home one day reporting on a fistfight he got into when someone on the street said to him that "the best thing Hitler did was to eliminate the Jews" . . . . (Hoffman, 2002, pp. 51, 52).

Beware, children! Life is not what you expect. People are not what you expect. There is an underlying fear that accompanies childhood in a survivor home. And the fearful memories continue far after childhood has been left behind. To attempt to speak through the fear and tell the stories, especially the ones passed down from the survivors, means continual confrontation, acknowledgement and "living-with" with disturbing past lives.

I did not attempt to lift the silence by introducing the idea of a happy utopia, as Marla Morris (2001) warns against, but rather to struggle with the memories.

Every day seems split by the present post-Holocaust era and the black sun of Auschwitz. The paradox is that the Holocaust is not “post” at all; it is here every day. Not only is it in my psyche, it is in the public eye as well . . . . There have been more books published on the Holocaust than only any other event in history . . . . the past bursts into the present at every turn . . . . The important issue for educators is . . . to keep this memory alive. “Never again” is the chant Jews utter. But how can we be so sure? Who is to say what the new millennium will bring? The Holocaust lives in a present absence. It is simultaneously here and not here . . . . too soon the next generation will forge t. . . Mrs. G came to our class to show us the numbers on her arm. She came to our 6<sup>th</sup> grade class to tell us that every time she hears a train she mourns. But I did not understand . . . . What does a 12-year old know? However, the memory of Mrs. G has stuck with me all these years; in fact, it has haunted me. (Morris, 2001, pp. 218-219)

A dystopic curriculum as espoused by Morris likewise asks us educators to put in front of students the warning that utopias, whether they be social, political or religious, silence memories, events and people. Therefore, I/Aliza troubled even the prophetic notion of a messianic age that has captured the imagination of the Jewish people. When the Holocaust and its memories are referenced through Morris’ dystopia, the haunting is what is passed on through the narratives of survivors and the diaries of victims, through the art from the camps and after the camps, from first generation to second generation to third generation. The heritage occurs in survivor families and in the greater family of humanity. My own inherited and vicarious memories caused me to imagine standing in the snow in shoes with holes and no socks, or to hear the screams of children in the crackling flames of a school bonfire. Every day objects had/have the ability to become ones that carry memories. My veiled eye through the camera lens saw/sees the past in shadows, in crevices, in the dying leaves on the fall trees.

As I attended to published and documented narrative stories of the Holocaust, I questioned if they reflected what Kathleen Casey (1993) referred to as “selectivities and

emphases, and the particular details and their ordering, as well as the implicit and explicit understanding in which they are set, [that] tell a tale much deeper than organizational analysis” (p. 30). This is particularly pertinent to Holocaust memories of both survivors and their children as some memories slip to the recesses of the mind while others loom as troubling specters in the foreground. I found myself unfolding stories to be able to hear the deeper tales. What I continued to hear were multiple and competing voices.

Likewise, when I thought about writing and making art as the fictional Aliza, I understood “slippage” to be an invitation to transgress common, more normative dissertation forms as I sought alternate ways of research engagement that would allow the unexpected, momentary, fleeting and contiguous to take part in the act. Through doubt and ongoing inquiry, I practiced and encouraged spiritual awareness in my own life and in my teaching/art-making activities and through post-Holocaust memory and representation.

David Purpel and William M. McLaurin, Jr. (2004) and H. Svi Shapiro (2006) introduced spiritual elements to the classroom for the sake of transformation. They referred not to religious creeds or laws or absolute Truth, but rather to an ethics of care that brings love into the public sphere of the classroom and hopes for a better day when all will be appreciated, acknowledged, heard, and healed. Their world-to-come will be one in which injustices cease, in which Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil” will not exist, and where there is liberation for all.

Purpel and McLaurin’s transformation “has to do with a fundamental change in moral and spiritual consciousness in which we erase the excesses of individualism,

materialism, competitiveness and acquisitiveness . . . [the change] energizes us to pursue personal meaning, social justice, world peace and ecological harmony” (p. 276). Neither Purpel nor McLaurin were very hopeful that this day will come; they called their own vision of educative transformation “fanciful” and suggest that the overwhelming systemic oppressions within culture, education, religion and politics will make the dream difficult to achieve.

Shapiro based his *tikvah* (hope), however, on human action, *tikkun olam*, repairing/healing the world, an image that has its roots in kabbalistic literature and appeared in the stories told by Hasidic rabbis. *Tikvah* is not the utopian journey back to the Garden or a transport to some apocalyptic perfect future. Rather, Shapiro (2006) moved towards and advocated

an education that can affirm the spiritual dimension of our existence—one that awakens in each person the sense of beauty, wonder, and preciousness of all life on our planet, and the interdependence that makes *continuation of this life* possible.” (p. 204, my italics)

I attempted, through Aliza, to propose a post-Holocaust inquiry based on *tikkun olam* that asked inquiring students to address the injustices of the world, while simultaneously imagining, creating, and engaging in an artful praxis for ending them. Aliza’s classroom, in essence, became a “community of meaning” (Shapiro, 2007, p. 80) in which teacher and students affirmed their own lives as they reached out beyond themselves and their classroom community to those on the margins. Shapiro rooted his vision in *tikvah* found in his Jewish heritage. “If you will it, it is no dream,” Theodor Hertz said about establishing the state of Israel.

Yet the *tikvah* is for a world that is not utopian, exclusive and based on metanarratives of grandeur and power, but rather grounded in the grit and humus of daily life. The will to dream of something better than oppression, poverty, illiteracy and all the other maladies of society is not at the expense of other people or countries. Aliza sought to “will” her classroom into a community of meaning as she and her students made inquiries about a post-Holocaust arts curriculum through which together they might begin to repair the world. I did not offer them a happy ending, but rather an honest look at the injustice and inequality in their various and expanding spheres: community, state, nation, and world. It is not an ending, but a spiral into becoming, into continuing and continual transformation

I, through Aliza, attended to multiple ways that I informed my own daily theorizing and artistic process of continual becoming through: 1) phenomenological observation of writing and art-making rituals; 2) intersecting dialogue of art-making and theory and post-Holocaust studies; 3) conversations with colleagues in the academic community regarding educational theories and ways of making meaning, and 4) examination of beliefs and perceptions—some set seemingly on firm ground, others fluid and becoming.

As Aliza engaged with her own theory in her blog and with her students in the classroom for the purpose of their academic and artistic growth, she used similar techniques in *fictive* sites to expand, engage and transform students’ own artistic interrogations on the themes of memory, inherited memories and the Holocaust. Through her students’ inquiries, she saw them question themselves into being. Through her

inquiries, I was better able to voice my own sometimes quavering questions situated on the edge of the abyss. I found myself questioning everything—my art, writing, praxis, teaching ability, and most importantly, my right to inherited memories, even as they appeared in the veiled vision of dreams. At the end of the process, I re-searched, re-cycled through previous blogs and art making to discover something more through ongoing and fluid meanings.

I often discovered new or deeper signs, and attached the additional thought to the blog. I saw new stigmata in the photographs, and wondered how much my intuitive third eye saw without letting my mind in on the vision until much later. The photographic images opened my eyes to new layers of seeing which occurred below the surface, on the ground, at night in darkness, or within the mirrored walls of elevators. I was able to see through eyes that were deeper, older, farther-seeing than my own.

And still I questioned: Is photography the only way through which I can explore memory? A photograph, most of the time, ends up matted and framed on a wall or desk, confined and untouchable. It is two-dimensional—hard, with sharp corners, and unmoving. While the art within it may grant the memories their space, I desired something more—something outside the frame, something pliable, touchable, folded and enfolding. Fabric, perhaps?

Another spiral: the thin gauze of a petticoat or a child's dress, written and marked upon. Fabric can catch the wind in ways that fold and refold it, that keeps it fluid and always moving, that embodies the person who no longer lives to wear it. I want to feel



that presence in my hands, as pliable and yielding as living flesh, as I begin another project, another artistic attempt to “remember”.

I think this will never end. No final answers. No final solutions. Just as Aliza left readers questioning the pending birth of her daughter, I am left with my theory. I claim my ongoing theoretical process and praxes of Holocaust research as a witness for carrying on the memories of the dead with whom I dance at night in my dreams. I remember them and take their memories into my own through my art and writing.

Ana. Issachar. Sarah. Herschel. Moishe. Rochel. Avraham. Gittel. Misha. . . . Elizabeth. Esther. Marion. Mack. I remember you all. *Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmay rabbah*. . .



Figure 119. *Zachor: Remember*, 2008. Collage, digital photographs, text, markings.

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